



GCSE English

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An Inspector Calls

An Inspector Calls



The Text Guide

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Introduction to 'An Inspector Calls' and J.B. Priestley

'An Inspector Calls' is about Society and Class Divides

- J.B. Priestley wrote *An Inspector Calls* in 1945, during the Second World War, but he set the play in 1912.
- In 1912, society wasn't equal — people with more money and from a higher class had more power.
- Priestley used the unequal society of 1912 as a setting to get people to think about inequality in 1945.

An Inspector Calls has a strong message...

- 1) The audience knows that the characters' world is going to go through terrible changes. 1912 was just before the First World War — which began in 1914 and killed millions of people.
- 2) Priestley wrote *An Inspector Calls* to challenge his audience to think about how many more disasters lay ahead for them if they didn't learn from past mistakes.

A wounded soldier receives first aid in a trench during the Battle of the Somme, 1916.



© Mary Evans / Robert Hunt Collection

The War years Affected J.B. Priestley's Life and Writing

- *An Inspector Calls* was written near the end of the Second World War, so the audience would have seen how war affected everyone. Soldiers were returning from the war and hoping for a better life.
- *An Inspector Calls* asks the audience to unite to improve society.

1894	Born in <u>Bradford</u>
1910	Left school and started work as a <u>clerk</u> at a wool firm.
1914-18	First World War. Priestley was <u>wounded</u> but survived.
1919-21	Studied for degree in modern history and politics at <u>Cambridge University</u> .
1922	Started work as a <u>journalist</u> in London.
1939	Second World War starts.
1940	Priestley presented a popular BBC <u>radio programme</u> , 'Postscripts', but his show was cancelled after members of the government decided Priestley's views were <u>too left-wing</u> (i.e. socialist).
1941-42	Priestley founded various <u>socialist organisations</u> .
1945	Second World War ends.
1984	Died, aged 89.



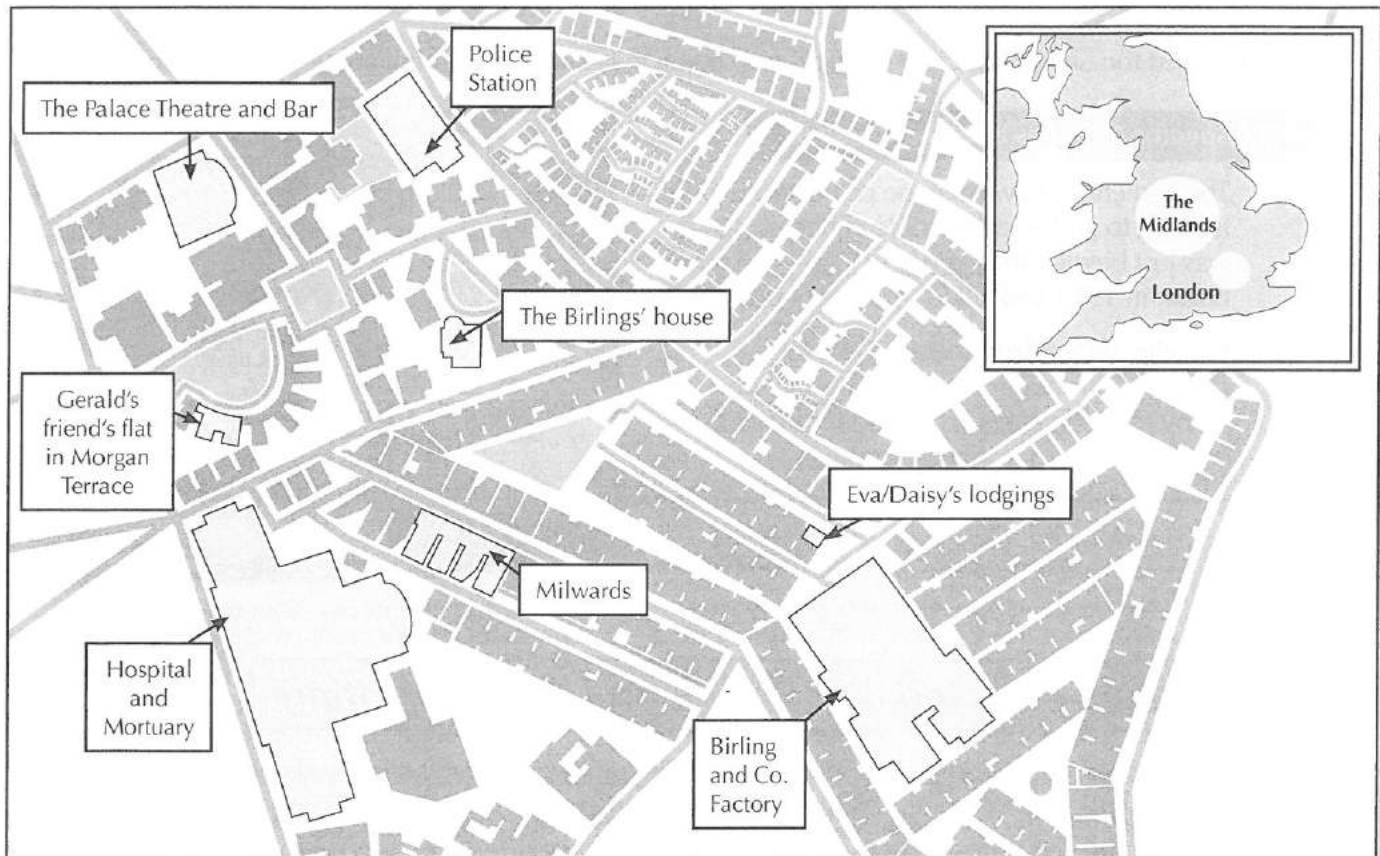
© UniversalimagesGroup/Contributor/Hulton Archive /Getty Images

For more about socialism, see p.36.

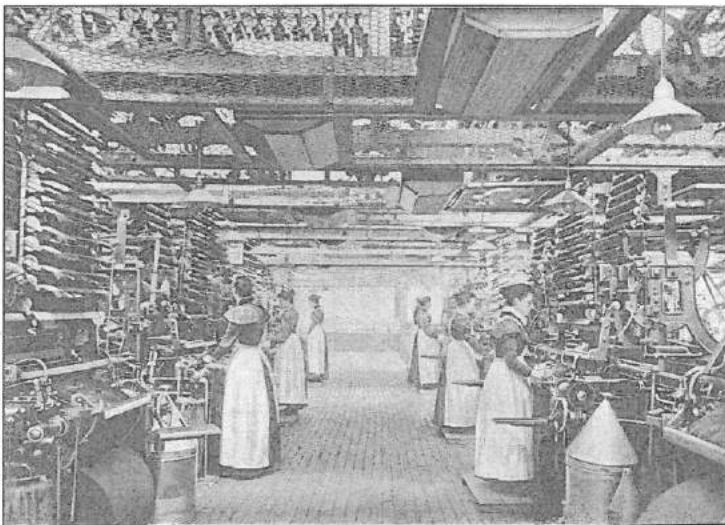
Background Information

*The play's set in **Brumley** — a **Fictional** town in the **North Midlands***

Brumley is described as an industrial city in the North Midlands. In 1912, cities like this would have had factories and thousands of terraced houses for all the factory workers. Here are the key locations in the play:



Status and Wealth kept the Classes Apart



Women working in a carpet factory, 1902.

- In 1912 the upper and middle classes lived pretty comfortably. Many middle-class men were wealthy and powerful because they had businesses or professional jobs, e.g. doctors.
- The working classes had a very different life. They had to work hard for little money, often in factories owned by the middle classes.
- People were expected to provide for themselves, so support for those in need was limited.
- This made it difficult for working-class people to help themselves if they fell on hard times.

Who's Who in Brumley



© Simon Cough Photography

Arthur Birling...

... is a successful businessman who is well respected in Brumley. He owns a factory and is head of the Birling family.



© Chasill Theatre Winchester

Sybil Birling...

... is Arthur's wife. She's obsessed with etiquette and her status in society.



© Simon Cough Photography

Eric Birling...

... is the Birlings' son. He's a secret alcoholic who's going to inherit his father's business.



© Simon Cough Photography

Gerald Croft...

... is an upper-class businessman. He's about thirty, and is engaged to Sheila.

Sheila Birling...

... is the Birlings' daughter. She's in her early twenties, and is engaged to Gerald.



© Marilyn Kingwill/Arena PAL. TopFoto.co.uk



© Donald Cooper/Rex Features

Edna...

... is the Birlings' parlour maid. She doesn't have many lines, but she welcomes the Inspector into the house. She's the only working-class woman on stage.

The Inspector...

... is a mysterious man who claims to be a police inspector. He's investigating the death of Eva Smith.



© Donald Cooper/Rex Features

Eva Smith/Daisy Renton...

... is the victim of the play. We never see her. She might be lots of different girls. She might not even be dead...



© iStockphoto.com/Ruben Hidaigo

'An Inspector Calls' — Plot Summary



'An Inspector Calls'... what happens when?

Here's a little recap of the main events of *An Inspector Calls*. It's a good idea to learn what happens when, so that you know exactly how the plot progresses and how all the important events fit together.

Act One — one spring evening in 1912...



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

- The Birling family are celebrating Sheila's engagement to Gerald. It all seems to be going well, but Sheila suspects that Gerald lost interest in her last summer.
- Arthur gives a speech to Eric and Gerald about business. He says that every man should look after himself.
- Inspector Goole arrives and says that a woman called Eva Smith has committed suicide by drinking disinfectant. He starts to question the family members, one by one.

- It turns out Arthur Birling sacked Eva Smith from his factory for striking in protest against low wages and that Sheila asked for Eva Smith to be sacked from a department store last year.
- The Inspector explains that Eva Smith then changed her name to Daisy Renton. Gerald appears shocked and Eric leaves.

Act Two — everyone's Tangled Up in the Inspector's Investigation

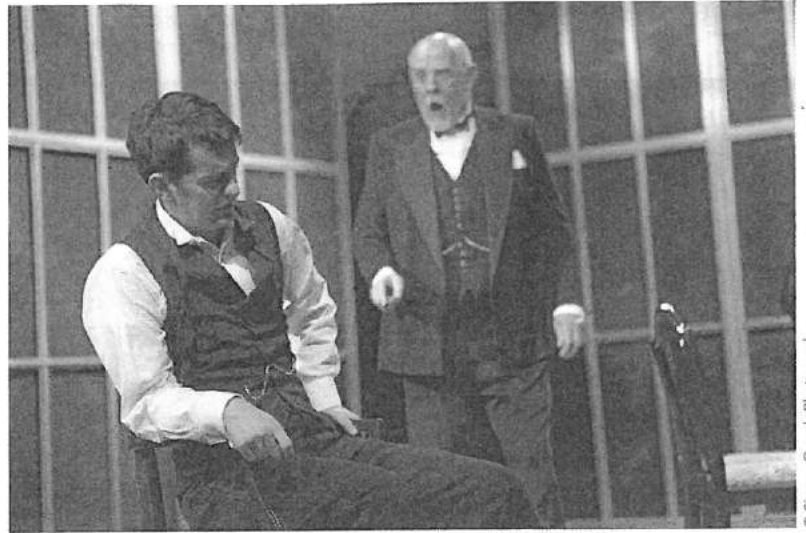
- Although he wants to keep it a secret, Gerald eventually describes how he spent last summer with Daisy Renton — she was his mistress.
- Gerald is upset. Sheila returns his ring and Gerald leaves.
- The Inspector gets Sybil to confess that she persuaded the Women's Charity Organisation to reject Eva/Daisy's appeal for help. Eva/Daisy was pregnant at the time.
- Sybil blames the father of Eva/Daisy's child for her death.
- Sheila guesses that the father of the child is Eric.



© Alastair Muir/Rex Features

Act Three — Eric brings Shame to the Family

- Eric returns. He knows that the Inspector has led everyone to the conclusion that he's the father of Eva/Daisy's unborn child.
- He describes how he met Eva Smith at a bar, and drunkenly forced her to have sex. He got her pregnant and then stole money from his father's office to support her.
- Eva/Daisy rejected the stolen money and turned to Sybil's charity for help. Eric says Sybil murdered her own grandchild by refusing to give her charity.
- The Inspector reminds the Birlings that we are all responsible for each other. He warns that unless everyone learns to look after each other, the lesson will have to be learnt later with greater suffering.



© Simon Gough Photography

Act Three — the final Twist...

- Gerald returns, having spoken to a police officer who doesn't recognise the name 'Goole'. Birling calls the police station to confirm there is no inspector called 'Goole' in the area.



© Francis Loney/Arena PAL. TopFoto.co.uk

- Gerald calls the hospital and finds out that no one has committed suicide. Birling, Sybil and Gerald decide it's all been a hoax and start to relax.
- Sheila and Eric argue that they are all still guilty of treating someone badly.
- The phone rings. A young woman has just been found dead after drinking disinfectant, and the police are sending an inspector to question the Birling family...

Ring, ring — this is your future self calling...

...to say thanks for starting off your revision so well. Once you're confident you know what happens when in *An Inspector Calls*, turn over the page to start Section One for some cracking analysis of the plot. If you're still not 100% clear on the plot, turn to the back of the book for the cartoon...



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

Analysis of Act One — Arthur's Speech

After getting to know Priestley and pinning down the plot, it's about time to work out what's really going on. This section will analyse the play, act by act, pointing out key plot points and explaining the play's themes.

The Birlings are having an Engagement Party

1) Everyone is content and saying the right things.

2) The Birlings are Priestley's idea of a 'perfect' middle-class family:

- the father's a successful businessman
- the mother works hard to keep up the Birlings' reputation in the community
- the son works for the father in the family business
- the daughter's engaged to the son of their competitor — this should improve the business because the two companies could merge in the future



© Simon Gough Photography

But there are Hints of Conflict under the surface

- 1) Gerald's family, the Crofts, are more established and socially superior. This makes Arthur Birling anxious.
- 2) Gerald says he was busy with work last summer. But Sheila's not really satisfied with this answer — "Yes, that's what you say."
- 3) There are big differences between what's expected of men and women. In this society, men are supposed to be busy with work and the world of public affairs. Women are supposed to be interested in family, clothes and social etiquette ('proper' behaviour).

Birling lectures the young men about War and Business

1) Arthur Birling's confident about the future for his family and business. He gives a speech with his predictions for the future. But the audience of 1946 knows what's coming, and it's not what Birling thinks:

- He says conflicts between workers and bosses will come to nothing. But there were many strikes between 1912 and 1945, including the General Strike of 1926, which saw the country grind to a halt for nine days.
- He says technological progress will continue, and gives the recently completed Titanic as an example. He says it's "unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable".
- Eric asks whether there'll be a war with Germany. Arthur says no way. But two years later, along comes World War One — war with Germany.

2) Priestley uses dramatic irony to make Birling look overconfident. It makes the audience think that Birling might be wrong about lots of other things, such as his belief in the motto 'Every man for himself'.

Writer's Technique

When the audience know more about something than the character on stage, it's called dramatic irony (see page 50).

Analysis of Act One — The Inspector Begins

An Inspector Calls and says a Girl has Died

- 1) The Inspector gives a blunt account of Eva Smith's death.
- 2) The harsh language — "Burnt her inside out" — contrasts violently with the polite and playful atmosphere at the start. The Inspector catches the Birlings off-guard, which helps his investigation.
- 3) The Inspector shows a photograph to Birling but doesn't show it to either Gerald or Eric. This is important because Gerald later suspects that each person was shown a different photograph, believing it to be the same one.

Theme — Family Life

The Birlings' family life is held together by secrets and polite behaviour. The Inspector disrupts everything and lets the secrets out.

Birling Sacked Eva Smith to protect his Business

- 1) The Inspector gets Birling to tell the story of why he sacked Eva Smith. This gives Birling a false sense of being in charge for a bit.
- 2) The workers at the Birling factory went on strike after Birling refused a pay rise. He wanted to protect his profits and prevent another strike, so he sacked the "ring-leaders", including Eva Smith.
- 3) This story gives the play a political element. Priestley's positioning the rights of the workers against the interests of the businessman.
- 4) Eva's described as a "lively good-looking girl". She's remembered as an attractive hero — this makes Birling look worse.

Theme — Social Responsibility

Birling sees employees as "cheap labour". If he can get them to work for less, he will do. He wants the opposite of 'social responsibility' — maximum profit for the individual.

Then Sheila got her Sacked from her next job



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

- 1) Sheila's shown a photograph — possibly not the same one that Birling saw. She recognises the woman she got sacked from Milwards last year.
- 2) Sheila's insecurity and jealousy made her think that Eva Smith was laughing at her at Milwards.
- 3) As a regular customer from a good family she had the power to demand that Eva Smith be sacked from her job. Sheila abused her influence.
- 4) But Sheila also says she "felt rotten about it at the time", and her reaction to the Inspector's news shows that she knew she behaved badly and that she's grown up a bit since then. Priestley portrays Sheila as a forgivable character.

The Inspector tried to call — but they were engaged...

It all seemed to be going so well... The play quickly takes a sour turn when the doorbell rings. Priestley sets things up nicely for the arrival of the Inspector — things can't get any better, so they have to get worse.

Analysis of Act One — Eva Smith is Daisy Renton

Priestley ends Act One with the Inspector's reappearance because it makes the audience wonder how much the Inspector already knows, and how much there is yet to find out. Priestley's keeping his audience alert.

Sheila and Eric are *Sympathetic*

- 1) Eric points out the hypocrisy of sacking Eva Smith for asking for higher wages because the Birling company "try for the highest possible prices."
- 2) Eric and Sheila give emotional responses to the Inspector's story, while their parents show no sympathy.
- 3) Sheila's repeatedly told to leave the room by both her parents — she stays because she feels it's her duty to stay to hear the whole story and to find out who's responsible.

Hypocrisy is when someone's actions don't match what they claim to believe.

Theme — Young and Old

The Birlings don't think a young woman should hear this grim story. However, Sheila's a young woman who thinks for herself and breaks away from her parents' traditional views.

Eva Smith changes her name to *Daisy Renton*

- 1) The Inspector explains that after being sacked from Milwards Eva Smith decided to change her name.

- Perhaps Eva Smith needed a dramatic change to escape her past.
- Or maybe this is just the Inspector spinning a tale to link two separate women.
- Either way, the name Daisy Renton's a fresh sounding name for a fresh start. But 'under the daisies' was a euphemism for being dead (see p.50). And 'renting' suggests prostitution. Maybe the name isn't so fresh after all.



© WATERGATE PRODS / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

- 2) Gerald is "startled" — he recognises the name.

Gerald Confesses to Sheila

Theme — Men and Women

It was considered okay for men to have affairs and mistresses. It wouldn't have been acceptable for Sheila to have a lover.

- 1) Birling and the Inspector leave to find Eric, giving Sheila the opportunity to question Gerald.
- 2) Gerald says his affair with Daisy was "over and done with last summer". He suggests that they should keep it secret so that it doesn't become a scandal.
- 3) Sheila's sure that the Inspector knows everything already — she's worried about "how much he knows that we don't know yet". Gerald and Sheila get more anxious and suspicious, which heightens the tension.
- 4) The Inspector slowly opens the door and looks "searchingly" as if he can read their expressions. He says only one word but it confirms that he's in control and expects something from them: "Well?"

Analysis of Act Two — Gerald's Affair

The Inspector is piecing together the events of the final couple of years of Eva/Daisy's life. Act Two starts with the Inspector questioning Gerald about how he came to know Daisy.

Gerald kept Daisy as his *Mistress*

- 1) Gerald ignores the Inspector's question, "Well?", and excuses Sheila for being "hysterical". He's trying to get Sheila to leave so he doesn't have to tell her more details about his affair.
- 2) The Inspector points out Gerald's hypocrisy in thinking that women should be "protected" when it's men like him that took advantage of Daisy Renton — "one young woman who wasn't" protected.
- 3) Gerald tells the others about his affair with Daisy. He defends the relationship — "You know, it wasn't disgusting", but Mrs Birling is shocked. She doesn't understand the term "women of the town" (prostitutes) and is upset to learn that Gerald's been seeing them.

Theme — Men and Women

If the Palace stalls are well known for being a place to pick up prostitutes, it's likely Gerald went there to find a prostitute himself.

Daisy fell in *Love* with Gerald out of *Gratitude*

- 1) Sheila suggests that Daisy loved Gerald as her "wonderful Fairy Prince". Gerald doesn't say he loved Daisy, but agrees that he "adored" being loved by her.
- 2) Gerald finished with Eva/Daisy just before he went on a business trip. Although he gave her some money, he effectively made her homeless.
- 3) Eva/Daisy went to a "seaside place" to remember their time together "just to make it last longer". For Gerald, it was a summer fling, but for Eva/Daisy "there'd never be anything as good again".

Gerald is *Shamed* and Sheila *Breaks Off the Engagement*



© Simon Gough Photography

Theme — Learning about Life

Although she's dazzled by the ring at first, Sheila's mature enough to realise the consequences of marrying a man who has lied to her.

- 1) Gerald should have confessed all this months ago. Less than an hour ago he said he hadn't seen Sheila much last summer because he was too busy at work. He lied.
- 2) Sheila says they'd "have to start all over again, getting to know each other".
- 3) Birling defends Gerald, saying, "you must understand that a lot of young men —". He implies that lots of men have mistresses.
- 4) Gerald doesn't ask Birling for permission to leave. He asks the Inspector. This shows that the Inspector's in control now, and not Birling.

Daisy, Daisy, give me your real name, do — I'm half crazy puzzling over you...

Gerald's not used to being in the company of people like the Inspector — he's confrontational, rude and aggressive. It's an approach that works though — it keeps the plot moving and gets people confessing.

Analysis of Act Two — Sybil Refused to Help

Priestley wants to show how lies underpin this family's life. Gerald's been lying about last summer, and Sybil's trying to avoid telling the truth. The fact that they're lying shows they know they've done wrong.

Sybil Birling is a Hard Nut to Crack

- 1) The Inspector presents Sybil with the photograph. She pretends she doesn't recognise it.
- 2) Even when the Inspector manages to press the story out of her, Sybil won't accept responsibility for her actions.
- 3) Sybil can't imagine herself in a similar situation to Eva/Daisy — she can't empathise. Sybil is so obsessed with social class and reputation that she can't recognise connections between her life and anyone else's.

Theme — Young and Old

The Inspector increases the tension between the parents and children by using Sheila's help to get Sybil to tell the whole story.

Sybil had the Last Chance to help but she Refused

- 1) Mrs Birling persuaded the committee to turn down Eva/Daisy's request because:

- Eva/Daisy said her name was "Birling". Mrs Birling thought it was a "piece of gross impertinence" (rude) for Eva/Daisy to dare to associate her own scandal with the Birling family name.
- She changed her story. At first she said her husband had left her and she was pregnant, but later admitted she wasn't married.

- 2) Priestley contrasts Sybil Birling's attempts to preserve her reputation with Eva/Daisy's moral standards. Eva/Daisy wouldn't marry the father of her child and wouldn't take any more money from him because:

- He was a "youngster — silly and wild and drinking too much".
- The money he'd been giving to her was stolen.
- He didn't love her.

Theme — Social Class

Mrs Birling dismissed Eva/Daisy's story as "ridiculous" because she couldn't believe that a girl of "that sort" (working class) would ever refuse money. She based her refusal on class prejudice.

Sybil won't take Responsibility

- 1) After trying to resist all the Inspector's questions, Mrs Birling realises that she can blame the father of the child instead of admitting her own guilt.
- 2) Sybil starts to tell everyone what she thinks should happen to punish this "young man".
- 3) Sybil blames the father for getting involved with a girl from a different class. She assumes she wouldn't know a man who drinks and steals.
- 4) She says that the Inspector should punish the man "very severely" before making him "confess in public his responsibility".



© Simon Gough Photography

Analysis of Act Two — Sybil Blames the Father

Mrs Birling really puts her **Foot** in it

- 1) While Sybil is blaming the father of the child, the Inspector doesn't intervene, but instead lets her walk straight into a trap — demanding that he punish her own son.
- 2) This is the most dramatic result of questioning each person separately — Sybil answers the Inspector's questions, totally unaware of what Eric is going to say.
- 3) But Sheila is open to the idea that her family are guilty and guesses that Eric might well be the "young man" that Sybil's determined to blame.



© Simon Caugh Photography

Sheila quickly **Sees** what's **Going On**

- 1) If the audience already think that Sheila has matured since the incident at Milwards, they realise that she's now a very different Sheila from the well-behaved and blushing bride-to-be of Act One.
- 2) Sheila can be determined and stubborn like her parents. But while her parents use their stubbornness to resist the Inspector, Sheila's stubbornness leads her to seek out the truth.
- 3) Sheila demands that Gerald and Sybil answer the Inspector's questions and tells Birling not to interfere when he's defending the behaviour of young men sleeping around.

Themes — Learning about Life

She recognised that she'd changed when she handed the ring back to Gerald, saying that they weren't "the same people who sat down to dinner".

And perfectly on cue — **Eric Walks In**



© Alastair Muir/Rex Features

Turning point in the action

All the major characters (except Gerald) are now on stage. Eric is forced to give a public confession.

- 1) Eric walks in, looking "extremely pale and distressed". It's as if he has been summoned to the dock, and his mother's already declared him guilty without knowing.
- 2) Eric's been absent for much of the play. He left the dining room in Act One and even left the house earlier in Act Two. Eric is always running away from his family and their expectations of him.
- 3) Act Two finishes with a cliffhanger. The audience is left wondering whether or not Eric was the "drunken young idler" that got Eva/Daisy pregnant.

You'd think that Sybil would know a lot about responsibility...

Sybil Birling accuses "the father" so aggressively, it's as if she's setting off a load of fireworks overhead to distract everyone from her own guilt. She's trying to cover her tracks. But all she's doing is lighting them up.

Analysis of Act Three — Eric Confesses

The Inspector just had to open the cracks in the Birling family, and it's broken apart. Priestley carefully engineered the plot so that once the ball got rolling, the family just started to self-destruct.

Eric Confesses all — and it's a bit of a Mess

- 1) Eric's ready to confess. He's guessed that the Inspector's helped everyone realise he's the father of Eva/Daisy's child — "You know, don't you?".
- 2) Eric explains that he forced Eva/Daisy to have sex with him, and got her pregnant — he was so drunk he threatened to cause a "row" if she didn't let him in to her flat.
- 3) He regrets his actions, but his language shows his immaturity. Eric calls Eva/Daisy "a good sport" and "pretty" — this sounds insensitive given how badly he treated her. Eric says that she treated him as a "kid".
- 4) Eric doesn't understand how middle-class men are supposed to behave. His parents think he's acted worse than Gerald, who knew how to have an affair without creating a scandal — but it makes the audience start blaming his parents for his upbringing.

Birling's Appalled — not by suicide, but by Theft and Shame



© Simon Gough Photography

- 1) Arthur Birling starts to take the situation seriously for the first time. His son's stolen money from the company to help support Eva/Daisy.
- 2) In the middle of Eric's story Arthur orders the women to leave.
- 3) Eric's involvement has gone too far for the Birling family. He'd have had an illegitimate child with a prostitute. This would have brought shame on the family.

Sybil returns and brings Eric Bad News

- 1) Sybil and Sheila return to the dining room because Sybil "had to know what's happening" — she disobeys her husband now she realises how involved she is in the story.
- 2) Because Eric's been outside, he hasn't heard that Sybil was involved in Eva/Daisy's and his child's death. When he finds out he's furious, and links her failure to "understand" to his own childhood — "You don't understand anything. You never did."

Themes — Family Life

Sybil's kept a polite household and a perfect reputation for the family, but at the cost of a close and understanding relationship with her children.



© Donald Cooper/Rex Features

Some productions, such as Stephen Daldry's (as seen above), emphasise Sybil's reaction to discovering her role in her grandchild's death.

Turning point in the action

Every member of the family has let down their defences. They're primed and ready for the Inspector's speech...

Analysis of Act Three — The Inspector's Speech

The Inspector has his Say

- 1) First, the Inspector sums up how each person at the dinner party played their part in Eva/Daisy's short life:

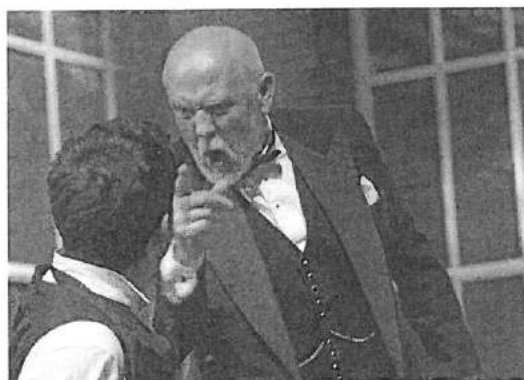


- 2) Now that the Inspector has broken through their defences, they're ready to hear his message.

- He links Eva/Daisy to the "millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths" — the rest of society, or even the rest of humanity.
- He says everyone is "intertwined" and "members of one body" — everyone shares "their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness" because everyone's affected.
- He warns that if people don't learn to be more responsible, they'll be forced to understand their mistakes through "fire and blood and anguish". The Inspector's foreseeing all the suffering that will result from selfishness, including the world wars.

The Birling Family Structure Collapses

- 1) The Inspector tells them at the start of Act Three that they'll have plenty of time to "adjust" their family relationships.
- 2) The first words after the Inspector's exit are Birling blaming Eric for their problems. This signals a decline from the Inspector's moral speech into petty squabbling.
- 3) Arthur Birling doesn't want anything to change. He's desperate to get things back to how they were — with him in charge.



© Simon Gough Photography

Everyone's ashamed — but not everyone's Ashamed of Themselves

Themes — Learning about Life

Birling says he's "learnt plenty", but not about how and why he's been wrong. He's learnt how Sheila and Eric really behave and think, and he's not impressed.

- 1) The word "ashamed" is passed between the family members. First Sybil tells Eric she's "absolutely ashamed" of his drinking.
- 2) Eric then says he's ashamed of his parents' actions.
- 3) Finally, Sheila says that she's ashamed of her own actions. She shoulders the blame, and asks everyone else to do the same.
- 4) The parents haven't learnt anything. They're more focused on trying to keep all the revelations in the family. The only thing they'd feel ashamed of is a scandal.

Eric fell down and broke social rules and the Birlings came tumbling after...

Things are hotting up. The play's coming to a close — it's usually time for the main characters to all learn their lessons. But this is the Birlings we're talking about. They're not going to learn anything. From anyone.

Analysis of Act Three — Was it a Hoax?

Just when you think you've got it all worked out, there's a big twist. It turns out that Mr Birling's evil twin wasn't killed in that carriage crash after all — he's just had gender reassignment. Just kidding — this isn't daytime TV.

The Inspector might not have been a Real Inspector

- 1) Sheila and Sybil realise the Inspector might be a fake, but they have different ideas about how important this is.
- 2) Sybil and Arthur agree that it makes "all the difference" if it wasn't a real police visit.
- 3) Sheila and Eric disagree — "He was our police inspector all right". It doesn't matter if the Inspector was fake if what he's shown them is true.



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

Gerald's return Splits the Family further

- 1) Gerald returns and says that he's found out there's no Inspector Goole on the force. Birling calls the police station to confirm that Goole wasn't a real inspector, and starts to think of the night's events as a hoax, with himself as the victim.
- 2) Sybil starts to rewrite her role in the evening — she says she's proud that she "didn't give in to him".
- 3) Gerald points out that the photograph might have been different photographs of different girls. Gerald calls the hospital and confirms that there's been no suicide — Birling is very relieved and considers himself guilt-free.
- 4) Gerald tells Sheila "Everything's all right now" while offering her the ring. She says it's "too soon" to be thinking about that and forgetting all she learnt this evening.
- 5) Gerald and Mr and Mrs Birling are relaxed and joking. The atmosphere seems just like it did at the start of the play — it's almost like a happy ending.

Themes — Writer's Technique

Priestley gives Gerald the role of a detective at the end of a murder mystery — he pieces together the events and summarises it for the others. But instead of solving the crime, Gerald makes it seem as if there was no crime at all.

A phone call... a Girl has Died, and an Inspector will Call

This news arrives with the same spooky accuracy as the Inspector's first arrival:

- 1) The Inspector first arrived just after Birling had said that "a man has to mind his own business". The Inspector's message was all about social responsibility.
- 2) And at the end of the play the phone rings just after Birling has laughed at "the famous younger generation who know it all". Birling still thinks he knows it all — he's not learnt the Inspector's lesson.

Now reread 'An Inspector Calls' in spectacles — hindsight is 20/20...

The ending is very unsettling. Was the Inspector a premonition or some sort of warning? What would have happened if the Birlings had accepted their guilt more easily? Is the whole play a warning to the audience?

Practice Questions

So, by now you should know *An Inspector Calls* pretty well, and be able to pick out important moments and details to help you analyse the plot. Try answering these quick questions in a line or two to make sure.

Quick Questions

Act One

- Q1 How does the opening scene suggest that the Birlings are the 'perfect' family?
- Q2 Before the Inspector arrives, Arthur Birling makes a speech about the state of the world. Name one event that the audience know will happen after 1912 which prove he's wrong.
- Q3 Explain in your own words why Arthur Birling sacked Eva Smith.
- Q4 Why does Eric disagree with his father's decision to sack Eva Smith?
- Q5 Explain in your own words why Sheila Birling got Eva Smith sacked.
- Q6 Give two reasons why Priestley would have Eva Smith change her name to Daisy Renton.

Act Two

- Q7 What word finishes Act One and begins Act Two?
- Q8 How does Sheila react towards Gerald once he has finished telling his story?
- Q9 Give one piece of evidence which suggests that Gerald's bad behaviour was quite common among middle-class men of the time.
- Q10 Give two reasons why Sybil refused to help Eva/Daisy.
- Q11 Who does Sybil say is ultimately the one responsible for Eva/Daisy's death?
- Q12 Why does Sheila suspect that Eric might be the "young man" who got Eva/Daisy pregnant?

Act Three

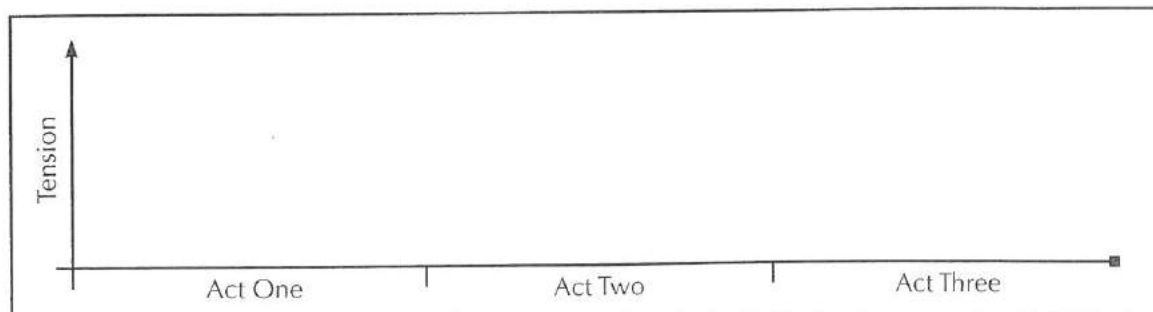
- Q13 Give two examples of language that Eric uses which suggests he's immature.
- Q14 What piece of news makes Eric turn on his mother?
- Q15 Summarise the Inspector's final speech in three main points.
- Q16 Explain how each of the four family members react to his speech.
- Q17 Why do the characters start to think that the Inspector might have been a fake?
- Q18 Three telephone calls are made in Act Three. Say who makes each call, and what is revealed.

Practice Questions

Feel like you're in the play — pretend that I'm the Inspector and I'm giving you a good grilling. Ah hello. May I come in? I've got a few questions for you. Yes, it concerns a certain play...

In-depth Questions

- Q1 Think about your first impressions of Sheila in Act One. What sort of character did you expect her to be?
- Q2 Do you think the Inspector planned to leave Sheila and Gerald alone together at the end of Act 1? How do you think this might benefit his investigation?
- Q3 Mrs Birling persuaded her charity to refuse to help Eva/Daisy. In your own words, explain why she might have done this.
- Q4 The Inspector questions Mrs Birling before he questions Eric. What do you think would have happened if Eric had still been in the room when Mrs Birling was explaining her role in Eva/Daisy's death?
- Q5 Priestley puts 'cliffhangers' at the end of each act in the play. How do these sudden endings affect the audience?
- Q6 Why do you think the Inspector leaves so abruptly after giving his final speech?
- Q7 Why do you think Priestley adds the final twist, rather than ending the play with the discovery that there was no suicide victim?
- Q8 Copy out the graph below. Draw a line that best represents the building of tension levels following these key events in the plot:
- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| a) Inspector's arrival | b) Gerald's confession | c) Eric's return |
| d) Inspector's speech | e) Gerald's 'theory' | f) The final phone call |



Practice Questions

You've read the play, you've answered the questions, you've got the T-shirt... Sadly the actual exam questions are likely to be a bit more challenging than the quick questions, so here are some practice exam-style questions so you know what you'll be up against.

Exam-style Questions

- 1 Look at Act One, from where Birling says "All right, Edna. Show him in here." to Eric's line "My God!" and answer the following question.
How does Priestley create a change in mood and tone in this passage?
- 2 'From the very beginning of the play, there are already signs of what is to come.'
Do you see the beginning of the play in this way? How does Priestley prepare the audience for the Birlings' downfall?
- 3 What is the significance of the title *An Inspector Calls*?
- 4 'The Inspector's descriptions of Eva Smith's death are unnecessarily graphic.'
How effective is the Inspector's language in presenting Eva Smith's life and death, and to what extent do you think his descriptions are necessary?
- 5 In Act Three, Eric admits his involvement in Daisy Renton's death.
He says "The fact remains that I did what I did."
How does Priestley present Eric as a forgivable character in Act Three?
- 6 Discuss the way that Priestley uses entrances and exits in Act Three of *An Inspector Calls*. Think carefully about how certain characters affect the order of events.
- 7 Discuss how Priestley uses the play's structure to build tension and increase the audience's curiosity. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
- 8 Look closely at Sheila's confession in Act One and the way she talks to her parents in Act Three. How does Priestley change the way Sheila is presented over the course of the play? Remember to use examples from the text to back up your answer.

Character Profile — The Inspector

At the end of the play it's not clear who or what the Inspector was. This uncertainty makes a big difference to some of the Birlings, but not to others. "Who was he?" and "Why did he 'call'?" are very different questions...

The Inspector "Massively" Takes Charge

- 1) The Inspector arrives unexpectedly. He just says he's here to ask some questions.
- 2) He's an outsider. He doesn't seem to have much in common with the Birlings.
- 3) The Inspector leaves after delivering a speech about social responsibility. When Gerald finds out that the Inspector is probably a fake, the older characters forget his speech and try to avoid the blame.
- 4) He is described as authoritative and imposing. He's not a big man — but his presence fills the room.



Photo: An Inspector Calls ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

Inspector Goole is...

Moral: "We don't live alone. We are members of one body"

Authoritative: "All in good time"

Mysterious: "Was it a hoax?"

An outsider: "The rude way he spoke to Mr Birling and me — it was quite extraordinary!"

The Inspector is the Driving Force of the Play

Think of the Inspector as the engine of the play — he keeps things rolling by asking pushy questions:

- 1) He starts it all off with a summary of the afternoon's events — "Suicide, of course."
- 2) He forces more information out of people by bluntly saying what the other characters try to skirt around — e.g. When Gerald's describing how he met Daisy Renton, the Inspector asks "And then you decided to keep her — as your mistress?" But it's not really a question. This forces Gerald to admit the truth.
- 3) He also reveals new information which heightens the drama, such as when he drops it into the conversation "that this girl was going to have a child".

The Inspector's 'Calling' is pretty Ominous

- 1) The word "calls" sounds so casual — as if he's just dropping in.
- 2) "Calls" is a deceptive word to use about the Inspector. He may appear casual and spontaneous, but in fact he's single-minded and calculating. If anything, he 'calls' the shots.
- 3) Another inspector "calls" the Birling household on the telephone at the end of the play.
- 4) The title of the play is echoed in Edna's words as she announces the arrival of Inspector Goole at the start of the play and in the telephone call at the end of the play.

Character Profile — The Inspector

His language is **Emotive and Personal**

- 1) Inspector Goole has come to the house to stir things up. He does this with emotive language.
- 2) He describes Eva/Daisy as a "pretty" and "lively" girl. These attractive words make the audience more sympathetic towards her.
- 3) This sympathy is strengthened by the harsh tone used to describe her death. He says that she's now lying "with a burnt-out inside on a slab".
- 4) Sheila is "rather distressed" by the Inspector's language and says that she "can't help thinking about this girl — destroying herself".



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The Inspector uses **Shock Tactics**

- 1) He answers his own questions if he's not happy with someone's answer — e.g. when Sybil refuses to admit there was a committee meeting he says, "You know very well there was, Mrs Birling."
- 2) He follows up questions with more questions until he has pieced together a confession — e.g. when Sybil won't say she convinced the committee to reject Eva/Daisy's appeal he asks "Was it or was it not your influence?"
- 3) He's blunt, "You're not even sorry now, when you know what happened", and is prepared to ask personal questions — e.g. he asks Gerald "Were you in love with her?".

Writer's Technique

Priestley makes the Inspector's language forceful and to the point — he forces the other characters to answer him.

He knows how to make an **Entrance** — and an **Exit** too...

- 1) The Inspector's timing's crucial. Priestley has the Inspector ring the bell just as Arthur says "a man has to mind his own business". It's as if Birling's announcement summons the Inspector to prove the exact opposite.
- 2) The Inspector uses exits as a clever tactic. Leaving Sheila and Gerald alone lets Sheila interrogate Gerald and allows the time for suspicion to break them apart. This makes it easier to get Gerald to confess when the Inspector returns.
- 3) The Inspector's language gets more dramatic, which builds on the tension and emotion of the final scene. He claims that if the Birlings don't learn their lesson, they will be taught it in "fire and blood and anguish."
- 4) After his last exit there's a sudden silence because no one else has been speaking. The audience, like the characters on stage, are left "staring, subdued and wondering".

For more about entrances and exits see page 48

An Inspector's called — an Inspector's called what?...

There's something about Goole. His authoritative voice and "massive" presence has got them all under his spell. No one suspects he's a "fake" until he's gone and they've had a chance to recover. Pretty impressive.

Character Profile — The Inspector

Inspector Goole — quite the mystery man. Is he an Inspector? Is he even a man? The audience know by the end that he “definitely wasn’t a police inspector at all”. But they don’t ever find out what he actually was.

Who is this Inspector Ghoul?

- 1) At the end of the play, the audience aren’t sure who or what the Inspector is.
- 2) He claims he found “a rough sort of diary” kept by Eva/Daisy. But her identity isn’t certain, and the audience aren’t sure she ever existed (see p.32-33). So, the diary might be a neat bluff to stop anyone asking him any questions.
- 3) Why he has so much knowledge and power is never properly explained. He could be a ghost. Or he could represent the spirit of a religious or moral figure — just like in the Medieval morality plays (see p.42).

Writer’s Technique

It’s a bit of a joke that Inspector Goole’s name sounds like ‘Ghoul’ — a word for ‘ghost’. Priestley’s put little clues into some of the character’s names (see Eva/Daisy on p.8 and p.33).

He’s More than a Police Inspector

- 1) In a way, he represents the police and the courts — he’s tracking down the truth, like in a murder mystery.
- 2) Because he’s not a police officer, Mr and Mrs Birling don’t think he has the authority to tell them off.
- 3) Eric and Sheila realise that his moral judgement is just as important as his legal power.
- 4) Goole has the attitude of a philosopher and social commentator, and the knowledge of a spooky ghost delivering a prophecy.



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His Authority strengthens his strong Moral tone

- 1) Whatever Goole is, his unsettling presence might just be down to confidence. He knows how to create an air of uncertainty and reel everyone in.

Writer’s Technique

It’s worth thinking about how an actor might play the Inspector — maybe with his voice getting louder and louder as the play progresses.

- 2) He makes sure everyone recognises that he’s in charge.
- 3) He takes control and leads the events. They’re confused, but Goole never is.
- 4) He “massively” interrupts which means that he cuts into the dialogue “with authority”, e.g. when he tells Birling that Eric can “wait his turn”.
- 5) His authority makes people take him more seriously and makes everything he says sound more important.

Character Profile — The Inspector

The Inspector's from a Different World

The Inspector doesn't share Arthur Birling's interests or values:

- 1) The Inspector doesn't play golf and he's not impressed by Arthur Birling's public profile as former Alderman and Lord Mayor.
- 2) He talks about taboo subjects like sex and politics.
- 3) He interrupts, repeats and pauses in ways which were not the norm in middle-class prewar England. He doesn't follow etiquette (normal rules of social behaviour).

*For more
about etiquette
see p.24.*

The Inspector is Classless

- 1) The Inspector seems to come from outside the class system that the Birlings live in. This makes him 'classless'.
- 2) The Inspector doesn't recognise any of the Birlings' ideas about class. He treats everyone the same.
- 3) Instead, he says that "We are members of one body" so classes shouldn't ignore each other's needs.

Theme — Social Class

Priestley has set his play in the Birlings' dining room. In 1912 only well-off households would have had a dining room — this makes it a symbol of the middle-class lifestyle.

Priestley uses the Inspector as a Mouthpiece

*See p.44 for more on
Priestley's socialist views.*



J.B. Priestley

- 1) The Inspector stands outside the class system of the Birlings' social world — he is an outsider in the play.
- 2) But he doesn't take a neutral position — he's on Eva/Daisy's side, and he tells the Birlings what he thinks of them.
- 3) Priestley's own views are reflected in the opinions of the Inspector. You could say that the Inspector is Priestley's 'mouthpiece' — Priestley's voice in the play.
- 4) This is most clear during the Inspector's final speech. He's speaking to the Birling family, but it could also be Priestley's speech direct to the play's audience.
- 5) The play (and Priestley) has a strong message about looking after one another, and it's the Inspector's job to deliver it.

I don't have class prejudice — I hate maths and geography...

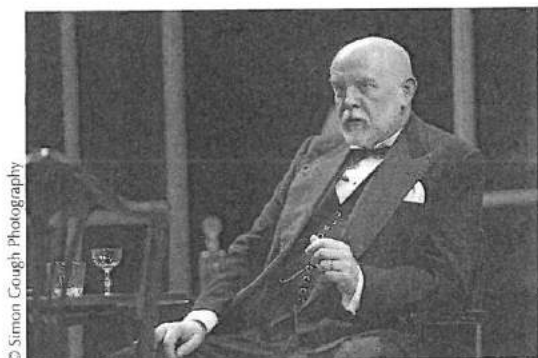
Gosh — what a pickle. Started off with easy things like what the Inspector looks like, and ended up deciding that he might be a ghost from a classless world being used as Priestley's ventriloquist puppet...

Character Profile — Arthur Birling

Arthur Birling's head of the Birling family. He's the boss of his own company. He even plays golf with the big shots. But he's so bothered about money and power that he can't think about anything — or anybody — else.

*Arthur Birling seems to be **Pretty Pleased with Himself***

- 1) Arthur Birling seems very confident. He is head of his family and the boss of his own business.
- 2) He likes to be in control and he keeps reminding everyone that he's in charge, e.g. Birling doesn't want to be told what to do, and "angrily" tells the Inspector, "Well — if you don't mind — I'll find out first".
- 3) Over the course of the play, Birling's authority is undermined. The Inspector reveals Birling as an ambitious, anxious man who'll ignore the needs of others to keep up profits and a good reputation.



Birling is...

ambitious: "there's a very good chance of a knighthood"

business-minded: "a hard-headed, practical man of business"

selfish: "a man has to make his own way"

anxious: "there'll be a public scandal — unless we're lucky"

*He's a successful and ambitious **Businessman***

- 1) Birling hints that his company could merge with the larger company owned by Gerald's father. He sees his daughter's marriage a bit like a business deal and hopes it will bring "lower costs and higher prices".
- 2) Birling thinks he's successful because he's a "hard-headed, practical man of business". He has the same attitude to all areas of his life.
- 3) He is very optimistic about the future. He thinks that strikes won't be a problem for his company and dismisses any fear of war as just some "silly little war scares".

Writer's Technique

Priestley uses dramatic irony to make Birling's optimism seem foolish and short-sighted (see page 50). This undermines his authority.

He Won't Accept Responsibility for the death of Eva Smith

Theme — Social Responsibility

Birling dismisses the idea of social responsibility. He calls people like Goole "cranks".

- 1) Birling finds it difficult to think about other people. He doesn't believe in "community and all that nonsense". He sees other people as "cheap labour".
- 2) Birling didn't just refuse higher wages for his workers — he actively made things worse for them. He personally fired the ringleaders of the strike.
- 3) Birling is selfish and self-centred. He'd rather pass off the Inspector's visit as a "hoax" or a joke than face up to what he's done.

Character Profile — Arthur Birling

*Birling likes to be **Respected** — he wants to be **In Control***

- 1) Birling's a public figure in Brumley and obsessed with his status. When his good name's threatened he's terrified and would "give thousands" (a bribe) to avoid scandal.
- 2) He isn't used to being challenged. The Inspector barely says twenty words before Birling shows "a touch of impatience".
- 3) Birling's family is falling apart, and he can do nothing about it. He blames the Inspector for making a "nasty mess" of the night's celebrations.



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*Underneath it all, Birling is an **Anxious** man*

Theme — Social Class

Birling's a wealthy businessman, but it was more prestigious to come from an "old county family" like the Crofts, that had land, inherited wealth and titles (e.g. 'Lord', 'Lady').

- 1) Birling desperately tries to win the Crofts' approval by talking about a knighthood and by getting Gerald's father's favourite port.
- 2) Birling tries to make himself seem important by drawing attention to his connections with influential people — e.g. he plays golf with the Chief Inspector.
- 3) The Inspector threatens Birling's middle-class values — the reputation of his company, his important connections. Birling is rattled by this. He has spent his entire life believing that these things matter.

*Birling uses **Authoritative Language** to be in **Control***

Priestley uses stage directions and careful language choices to help create Birling's character:

- 1) Priestley writes that Birling should be "provincial in his speech", which means he has a regional accent. Accent and social class were closely linked, so it would be clear that Birling was a middle-class businessman rather than upper-class.
- 2) Birling has the most continuous speech in the play — he likes to talk and doesn't like being interrupted. When Eric tries to correct him, Birling ignores him, saying "Just let me finish, Eric".
- 3) Birling repeatedly shouts "Rubbish!" to dismiss what other people have said. But he finishes his own sentences with "of course", to make his own claims seem obvious and matter-of-fact.

Birling's a bad egg — a hard-boiled, practical man of business...

Birling's looking after number one, and he's not going to change. He wants his business to make higher profits, but Priestley uses the character of Birling to show that this profit comes with a high moral cost.

Character Profile — Sybil Birling

Sybil is proud of her reputation and social status. She'll do anything to protect them — they're more important than the happiness of her children. Even when the Inspector's questioning her, she won't back down.

Sybil Birling is Proud of her Social Status

- 1) Sybil has traditional values. She strictly follows the rules of etiquette because a good reputation for being polite will improve her family's status. These rules are more important to her than moral rules — the difference between good and bad.
- 2) She has a strong set of beliefs about people's social status, which makes her prejudiced.
- 3) To preserve her own status, she's prepared to be cruel, such as when she rejects Eva/Daisy's appeal.

Etiquette

Etiquette is a set of rules about social behaviour — what's 'acceptable' and what isn't.



Sybil is...

traditional: "When you're married you'll realize..."

proud: "I was the only one of you who didn't give in to him"

prejudiced: "As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!"

cruel: "I used my influence to have it refused"

Sybil is Mr Birling's "Social Superior"

Sybil Birling is from a family with a higher social status than Arthur Birling's family. Even though Arthur's head of the family, Sybil is his "social superior":

- 1) Sybil tells her husband off for saying the food was good in front of a guest. It wasn't polite to mention the cook or lower servants. Upper-class families would not say "Tell cook from me".
- 2) Sybil's always reminding her family to have better manners — e.g. she tells Sheila off for using slang.
- 3) Sybil won't let anyone boss her around. She warns the Inspector, "You have no power to make me change my mind".



Sybil lives by Strict Standards

- 1) Sybil's social standards make her prejudiced against people from a lower class. She thinks that they have lower standards and can't imagine her son being involved with women "of that sort".
- 2) It's her 'standards' that make her walk straight into the Inspector's trap when he asks her who she blames for Eva/Daisy's suicide.
- 3) Even though it was Sybil herself who refused to help Eva/Daisy when she most needed it, she blames the father of the unborn child.
- 4) Without realising it, she condemns her own son and demands that he should be made to pay, and to confess publicly.

Character Profile — Sybil Birling

Mrs Birling Supports Charity — but she's not very Charitable

- 1) Mrs Birling is involved with the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation which she says only supports "deserving cases".
- 2) This gives Mrs Birling the authority to decide who's "deserving" and who's not.
- 3) She uses her "influence" (social status) to convince the other members of the board to reject Eva/Daisy's appeal because she's offended by the young woman using the Birling name.
- 4) She's outraged that Eva/Daisy would pretend to have the "fine feelings" of a higher social class, but Mrs Birling is unfeeling towards the women who make appeals to her.

Theme — Social Responsibility

The word "deserving" was traditionally used to distinguish between the poor who physically can't help themselves and the undeserving who shouldn't be helped.

Mrs Birling Doesn't Change



- 1) Mrs Birling is self-centred. She hasn't noticed her own son's alcoholism and dismisses her daughter's worries that Gerald lost interest last summer.
- 2) She won't accept responsibility for her actions, and claims that she did the right thing — "I accept no blame for it at all".
- 3) She doesn't learn from the Inspector's message. She only regrets not having "asked him a few questions" — she wants to be in control.

Stage Directions show Mrs Birling has her Mind Made Up

Even when her language is polite, her tone is severe and superior:

- 1) The stage directions say that Mrs Birling answers "haughtily", "very sharply" and "bitterly".
- 2) In Act Three, Mrs Birling repeatedly tells everyone that she'd already guessed it was a hoax. The script says that she "triumphantly" tells everyone she knew it all along. It's more important to her that she comes out on top, than that her actions could have caused a girl's suicide.
- 3) In the final moments of the play, Mrs Birling is "smiling" and telling everyone to feel as "amused" as she is by the evening's events. These words suggest she has already put it all behind her.

Sybil — star of It's-not-my-Faulty Towers

Sybil's so wrapped up in etiquette and class hierarchy that she can't see how she's affected the lives of others. Even her own children. And at the end of the play, she carries on as if nothing happened.

Character Profile — Sheila Birling

Sheila's not heard the old saying 'start as you mean to go on' — at the beginning of the play she seems childish and petty, but later reveals herself as thoughtful, sensitive and sharp. By the end, Sheila wants to start again...

*Sheila seems to be **Different** from the rest of her family*

- 1) Sheila's quick-witted and strong-minded. She hands Gerald's ring back when she finds out he's been unfaithful and is wise enough to suspect that Eric might be the father of Eva/Daisy's child.
- 2) However, Sheila was more selfish the year before. She abused her status as a wealthy customer at Milwards when she insisted they dismiss Eva/Daisy.
- 3) Sheila is now seen to be sensitive and moral. By the end of the play, Sheila has changed for good.



© Simon Gough Photography

Sheila is...

Strong-minded: "I don't believe I will. So you be careful."

Sharp: "he's giving us the rope — so that we'll hang ourselves"

Selfish: "you used the power you had [...] to punish the girl"

Moral: "But these girls aren't cheap labour — they're people"

*Sheila's **Language** makes her seem **Childish** at first...*

- 1) The stage directions say she's "very pleased with life and rather excited".
- 2) She uses slang expressions like "squiffy" which remind the audience that Sheila belongs to a younger generation.
- 3) When she gets the ring she's very excited, and looks to her mother for approval when she says "Look — Mummy — isn't it a beauty?".
- 4) She jokes with Gerald, but the stage directions say that she's "half serious, half playful". Her childishness might be a way to hide "serious" concerns about her relationship with Gerald.

Writer's Technique

Priestley gives Sheila lots of witty lines to make her appear sharp. Sheila's wit lets her undermine the authority of the others as she makes jokes at their expense.

*...but Sheila's more **Mature** than the **Audience** first think*

Sheila behaves childishly at the beginning, but what she learns over the evening makes her feel she has to be herself and break away from her parents.

- 1) She has wise instincts — she sees what the Inspector is doing, and knew Gerald's absence was suspicious.
- 2) She's not naive — she knows men use prostitutes and knows about dirty old men like Alderman Meggarty.
- 3) As the Inspector says, she "isn't living on the moon", and as she says to her father, "I'm not a child."



Character Profile — Sheila Birling

Sheila has **Moral Standards**

- 1) Sheila acknowledges she used her "power" to "punish" Eva Smith, but she regrets her actions and is eager to learn from the consequences.
- 2) Priestley uses her as a moral judge at the end of the play — she says "probably between us we killed her." The others don't get as far as admitting that.
- 3) She tells Gerald she respects him more for being "honest". She also knows the family must stop these "silly pretences". Priestley uses Sheila to show there's hope for change in the new generation.

Theme — Learning about Life

Priestley makes Sheila seem young and childish at first. It makes her involvement in Eva/Daisy's downfall seem the result of immaturity. This makes it easier to forgive her.

The Inspector's **Revelations** change her for **Good**



- 1) Before Gerald leaves, she hands back the engagement ring, saying that they are changed people — "You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner here."
- 2) After the Inspector goes, her parents want everything to return to the way it was. Sheila, along with Eric, are the only ones who see that they all have to change.
- 3) Out of all the characters in the play Sheila's the one who changes the most.

Sheila becomes a bit like the **Inspector** herself

It's not surprising that Sheila takes the Inspector's side in a lot of this, and even seems to help the Inspector's investigations. They're both after the truth. She adopts some of the Inspector's techniques:

- 1) She asks Gerald as many questions as the Inspector does.
- 2) She reveals Eric's drinking problem to her mother.
- 3) She contradicts and undermines her parents, like the Inspector does. When she's giving the ring back to Gerald she tells her father, "Don't interfere".
- 4) She shocks Eric by telling him that his mother refused to help Eva/Daisy. The Inspector moves the discussion on quickly by suddenly startling the listeners, and Sheila does the same.

Sheila sees that the Inspector attacks the others' confidence by asking questions. He does this to break down the "wall" which they've put between themselves and the girl — Sheila wants to do the same.

Sheila's moral all right — but she does nothing for the morale...

Sheila's character offers hope to the audience — she's grown up and realised that she needs to change her priorities. She's sensitive and has allowed the Inspector's tragic story to affect her — and change her.

Character Profile — Eric Birling

Eric is a troubled soul. He has turned away from his family and taken up drinking. But no one seems to notice, or at least they think it's more polite to not mention it. So, instead, Eric's friendless and stuck.

Eric Birling is a Troublesome Son

- 1) Eric's isolated from the rest of his family. He says that no one understands him and he doesn't feel as if he can talk to any of them.
- 2) Eric apparently forced himself on Eva/Daisy while he was drunk and got her pregnant. He was so drunk he didn't even remember it happening.
- 3) Eric deeply regrets his actions — by the end of the play he says he'll never forget what he has learnt.



© Simon Cough Photography

Eric is...

Irresponsible: "I didn't even remember — that's the hellish thing"

Unloved: "You don't understand anything. You never did."

Sensitive: "My God — I'm not likely to forget"

An alcoholic: "I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty"

Priestley drops hints that Eric Isn't All Right

- 1) Priestley's stage directions say that Eric is "not quite at ease". He's described as being "half shy" and "half assertive".
- 2) He interrupts Sheila and Gerald when he "suddenly guffaws", but says he doesn't know why he's laughing. He finds things his family say funny, even when there's no joke.
- 3) When Gerald says, "Unless Eric's been up to something," Eric acts suspiciously and seriously — "I don't think it's very funny," he says "still uneasy", and also answers "defiantly".

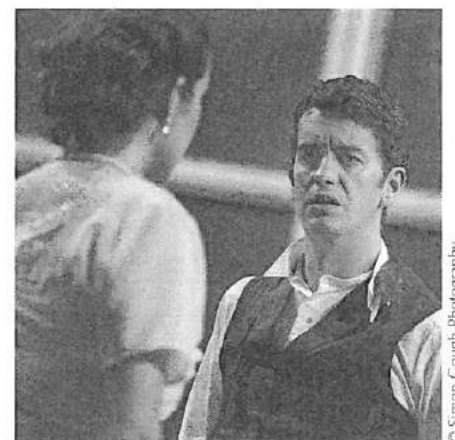
Writer's Technique

Priestley uses Eric's odd behaviour to hint that his secrets will later disrupt and threaten the Birlings' whole way of life.

Eric's been Hiding some Dirty Secrets

Eric's drunkenness and bad behaviour represent the dark side of family life.

- 1) He's a heavy drinker, and has been for a while. You can see his "familiarity with quick heavy drinking" in the way he pours his whisky in Act Three. The rest of the family sees it too.
- 2) He got a prostitute pregnant — his first encounter with Eva/Daisy results in her getting pregnant and there's a suggestion that he forced himself on her.
- 3) He has stolen money from his father's business to support her.



© Simon Cough Photography

These secrets are potential dynamite — if they got out and became public gossip, then Birling's knighthood, Sheila's marriage and the whole family's reputation could be blown sky high.

Character Profile — Eric Birling

*Eric's **Not** the only one...*

- 1) Eric meets Eva/Daisy at the stalls bar, which is exactly where Gerald met her, when he was looking for prostitutes.
- 2) Birling's 'respectable' friends go to the stalls bar to find women. The Alderman, Meggarty, even assaults young women in the town hall. They're all behaving badly. But no one says anything.
- 3) It's a pretty murky world that these 'respectable' men inhabit. The play suggests Eric's behaviour is normal for a middle-class man.



© Mary Evans Picture Library

*Two finely dressed upper-class
(not always) gentlemen.*

*... but he's the **Only One** to have **Serious Consequences***

- 1) Eric's behaviour was not unusual — lots of men were doing the same... just in secret. Eric lacks self-control so his secret gets out.
- 2) His parents don't want a scandal. They don't care about him as much as they care about what other people will think of them.
- 3) Eric's laugh interrupts the polite conversation earlier in the play. It's the same when his behaviour disrupts the polite middle-class illusion of respectability. They're all keeping up appearances — but Eric's making it obvious that there's something murky underneath.

Theme — Judgement

Gerald treats Eva/Daisy as his "mistress" and ends the affair — his reputation is not damaged. But Eric drunkenly gets Eva/Daisy pregnant, steals money for her and brings a scandal on his family.

*Eric is a **villain** and a **victim***

Theme — Family Life

Birling seems disappointed in his son, and gets on better with Gerald. This must be a crushing blow for Eric.

- 1) Eric feels isolated and unsupported — he's had to find comfort elsewhere.
- 2) He shouts at his mother — "You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried —" and perhaps he's right. But he's really yelling. It might be the angriest moment in the play.
- 3) He's the obvious villain of the piece, but he accepts responsibility for what he did — "the fact remains that I did what I did". He criticises his parents for pretending nothing's happened — "You lot may be letting yourselves out nicely".

Too frisky and two whiskies makes our Eric far too risky...

At first, it seems clear that Eric has the lowest morals of all the characters. But then he regrets his mistakes and learns from them. He comes the furthest — the audience start to see him in a more sympathetic light.

Character Profile — Gerald Croft

Gerald's the son-in-law Mr Birling dreamt of. He's the son of the competition, Croft Limited. His mother's a Lady. He's respectable. So, apart from the secret mistress, he's spot on.

Gerald Croft is an Eligible Bachelor

- 1) At the start, Gerald seems like a good catch. He gets on well with Mr Birling and impresses Sybil Birling.
- 2) But then it turns out Gerald's been lying — he confesses that he had a fling with Daisy Renton last summer. Sheila hands his engagement ring back.
- 3) Gerald leads the Birlings to realise that Inspector Goole was not a police officer, and that there was no suicide recorded at the hospital. He sides with Mr Birling, focusing on how to protect their reputation.



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010
Lamb's Players Theatre

Gerald is...

Respectable: "the easy well-bred young man-about-town"

Upper-class: "landed people and so forth"

A liar: "I wasn't telling you a complete lie"

Traditional: "I should say so!" (Gerald agreeing with Birling)

Gerald's got a Rosy Future ahead of him...

Gerald's got a lot going for him. He's handsome, wealthy, about thirty — a respectable man-about-town.

- 1) He's from an old county family — unlike the Birlings. That makes him their social superior.
- 2) Gerald works for 'Crofts Limited'. This is his father's firm, and is older and bigger than 'Birling and Company' — the two companies are "friendly rivals". He'll probably take it over when his father retires.
- 3) He's relaxed and comfortable in this company (unlike Eric), and shares jokes with Birling.

... but it's a Future that looks an awful lot like Birling's

Gerald's like a younger version of Arthur Birling. He's used to and comfortable with being in control.

- 1) Gerald agrees with Birling on politics and women and laughs at his joke about getting into trouble.
- 2) He supports Arthur's sacking of Eva Smith — "You couldn't have done anything else."
- 3) He's business-minded and is committed to his work in the same way that Arthur Birling is.
- 4) He and Arthur are the ones who are determined to take action at the end to find out whether the Inspector or the girl were real.

Theme — Young and Old

If it wasn't for Gerald, it'd be easy to say that Mr and Mrs Birling are selfish and unchanging because they're too old. But Gerald's character shows that younger people can be just as selfish and old-fashioned.

Character Profile — Gerald Croft

Gerald's *Language* shows that he doesn't feel **Sorry** for his actions

Priestley makes Gerald sound less passionate than Sheila. Gerald can distance himself from the tragedy.

- 1) He's the first character to use the word "hoax" — he's very keen to prove the Inspector was a fake and clear everyone's names.
- 2) At the end of the play, he says "Everything's all right now, Sheila" to comfort her. He doesn't seem to have learnt any lessons.



© Simon Cough Photography

He thinks he's done **Nothing Wrong** — but he's just as much to **Blame**

Theme — Social Class

Gerald might have made Eva/Daisy happy for a time, but he still treated her badly because of her social status. He kept her as a mistress for his own pleasure and discarded her when it suited him.

- 1) Gerald says that Eva/Daisy "didn't blame me at all". Perhaps the audience don't blame Gerald much at first because Eva/Daisy didn't.
- 2) The Inspector isn't too harsh on him because Gerald "had some affection for her and made her happy for a time". Gerald had some positive effects on Eva/Daisy's life.
- 3) But then he left her and went off on a business trip. He effectively made her homeless.

Gerald's not simply **Bad** or **Good**

This is a difficult one. Priestley's made it hard to see Gerald as simply good or bad. He's a complex character.

- 1) Gerald is confident but he's also stubborn — he doesn't learn much about himself over the course of the play. The Inspector points out Gerald's hypocrisy:

- The Inspector asks Gerald whether he thinks "young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?". Gerald says yes, thinking of Sheila.
- But it's people like Gerald who are doing the unpleasant and disturbing things to women like Eva/Daisy — he uses her and then discards her. This applies just as much to Mr Birling and other men like him who have the same attitudes.

- 2) Gerald has the ability to separate his public, respectable image from secret, private acts — something Eric doesn't get the hang of.

Gerald's not shallow — he's just emotionally challenged...

Gerald's upset when he learns that Eva/Daisy's dead — but he gets over it pretty quickly. He's not one to let a fake inspector play a prank on him. Not when he's got a reputation to maintain, and Sheila to win back.

Character Profile — Eva Smith / Daisy Renton

Who was Eva Smith? No idea. Were Eva Smith and Daisy Renton the same person? Was she even real? No idea. What matters most is what Eva/Daisy represents, and what she means to the Birlings.

Who was *Eva Smith*?

- 1) Eva Smith was one of Arthur Birling's employees, who was sacked for protesting against lower wages. This dismissal is the first in a chain of events that sees the Birling family tied up in Eva Smith's death.
- 2) According to the Inspector, Eva Smith changes her name to Daisy Renton and becomes a prostitute, which is how she meets Gerald and Eric.
- 3) The real identity of Eva/Daisy is never revealed. She could be the same person, or different people who are treated as the same by the Birling family. They see one working-class girl as being the same as another.



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Eva/Daisy is...

Attractive: "young and fresh and charming"

Honourable: "she didn't want to take any more money from him"

Working-class: "Girls of that class", "a girl of that sort"

A Prostitute: "There was some woman who wanted her to go there"

The Birlings *Take Away* all of Eva/Daisy's sources of *Income*

1) Factory worker at Birling and Company — she was a good worker but Birling sacked her for speaking up.

2) Shop assistant at Milwards — Sheila got her sacked out of jealousy for Eva/Daisy's good looks.

3) Prostitute and mistress to Gerald — he rescued her from the life of a prostitute but dropped her when it suited him.

4) Prostitute — she can't make a living this way after Eric forced her to have sex and got her pregnant while he was drunk.

Theme — Social Class

Eva/Daisy lost all these forms of support because other people used their power to move her on or have sex with her. Each of them felt superior to Eva because of their social class.

She *Never* sought *Revenge*, so the *Inspector* does it for her

- 1) Priestley has made Eva/Daisy a silent, offstage character, so in the play she represents the silent, invisible and powerless members of society.
- 2) Maybe Eva/Daisy didn't feel that she had the power to make life difficult for the people who mistreated her. She was trapped by her situation.
- 3) Inspector Goole speaks for Eva/Daisy and uses her as a symbol of the powerless working class to teach the Birlings about social responsibility and to make them realise their mistakes.

Theme — Social Class

Some productions of *An Inspector Calls* put Eva/Daisy on stage, sometimes as a ghost.

Character Profile — Eva Smith / Daisy Renton

Were *Eva Smith* and *Daisy Renton* the Same Person?

- 1) Gerald claims there were lots of different girls — “We’ve no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl.”
- 2) But Gerald also says that Daisy Renton told him about having to leave a “job in one of the works here” after a strike and “something about the shop too” — so Eva Smith must be Daisy Renton. But...

- The phone call at the end of the play confuses everything. Has Eva/Daisy just committed suicide? Was the Inspector a ghost come to tell the future?
- Or is this a phone call about a different girl? The Inspector warned that everyone’s lives are “intertwined”, so the Birlings don’t know how many lives they have affected.
- Priestley makes sure that, even if you think you’ve sussed it, that phone call breaks up the girl’s identity again.



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

Eva Smith is a sort of Everyman

The identity of Eva Smith is a kind of jigsaw portrait of an ordinary working-class girl, only you don’t know if the pieces fit.



- 1) Take her first name. “Eva” — a bit like Eve, the first woman (so the Bible says) and symbolic of all women.
- 2) Take her second name — Smith. It’s a very common last name, and it’s from the word for a tradesman.
- 3) That’s it — Eva Smith represents all ordinary, working-class women.

Eva Smith is Central to the play’s Message

- 1) The Inspector says that there are “millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left” and that their chances of happiness are “intertwined with our lives”.
- 2) This is the key point — the Inspector is telling the Birlings, and the audience, to behave responsibly towards others.
- 3) So, although the focus of the drama is the group of five people sitting around the dining table at the beginning, the focus of the play is the life and death of an unidentified and unseen woman. If they all met different girls, it doesn’t matter. Eva/Daisy is a mix of all the people they’ve ever treated badly.

Gerald ♥ Daisy 4 Eva — or for the summer of 1911 at least...

It’s pretty weird to stop and think that every single thing you do can affect someone else. It’s true though. And Priestley uses Eva/Daisy as a way of showing his audience how everyone is responsible for one another.

Practice Questions

Congratulations — that's another section done. As a special reward for your hard work, here's a trophy and a huge cake. Oh no, sorry, it's two pages of practice questions. Well, don't spend too long on these quick and in-depth questions — just use them to warm up for the next page. What a treat.

Quick Questions

- Q1 Give two examples of how the Inspector manages to unsettle Mr Birling.
- Q2 Summarise the message of the Inspector's speech in one sentence.
- Q3 Find three stage directions that show how the Inspector is supposed to talk and look.
- Q4 Give an example of how Arthur tries to impress the Inspector.
- Q5 In one sentence, describe how Sheila comes across at the beginning of the play?
- Q6 Name three ways in which Sybil and Sheila are different from each other.
- Q7 Which character first suggests that the photograph is key to finding out Eva/Daisy's true identity? What does this character say about the photograph?
- Q8 Find a quote to show that Eric regrets his actions.
- Q9 Give two reasons why Gerald Croft is seen to be socially superior to the Birlings.
- Q10 How did each of the Birlings affect the life of Eva/Daisy?

In-depth Questions

- Q1 Who or what is the Inspector? Do you think that Priestley wants us to know?
- Q2 At the start of the play, Birling is in control. When and how do you think the balance of power shifts from Birling to the Inspector?
- Q3 If you were in charge of costume design for *An Inspector Calls*, how would you dress Mr Birling and the Inspector? You can sketch out an idea or write a paragraph explaining why you chose these costumes.
- Q4 Do you think Sheila and Gerald should get married? Why do you think this?
- Q5 Do you think Mrs Birling learns anything from the Inspector's visit? Use quotations from the text to back up your answer.
- Q6 Both Eric and Gerald have relationships with Eva/Daisy. What do you feel about the way each man behaves towards her?
- Q7 For much of the play, the younger generation (Sheila and Eric) hold different views from the older generation (Mr and Mrs Birling). Whose views does Gerald share? Find some quotations to back up your answer.
- Q8 Explain the symbolism of Eva Smith's name and how this fits in with her role in the play.

Practice Questions

Now for the biggies. You should be practiced, warmed-up and raring to go. Write your answers to these as if they're the real thing — imagine you're sitting in the exam hall, chewing the end of your pen, and you've got a side or two of paper to fill for each question. But don't fret — they're not the real thing. It's time to practise.

Exam-style Questions

- 1 'The main character in *An Inspector Calls* is never even on stage.'
Write about how Priestley presents the character of Eva Smith/Daisy Renton?
- 2 'The Birling family are presented as a close and happy family at the beginning of the play, but are left broken by the end.'
How far do you agree with this assessment of the presentation of the Birling family?
- 3 Which character is the most responsible for the death of Eva/Daisy?
Use details from the play to explain your answer.
- 4 "Everything's all right now, Sheila. [*Holds up the ring.*] What about this ring?"
How does Priestley present the changing relationship between Sheila and Gerald over the course of the play?
- 5 'The Inspector's an outsider — he comes in from the outside and turns the Birling family inside out.'
What is the role of the Inspector in the play and how does Priestley use him to carry the play's message?
- 6 'Sybil is perhaps the most unsympathetic character of them all.'
How does Priestley present the character of Sybil Birling to the audience during the play?
- 7 'The Birling family don't seem to consider Gerald's affair to be as shameful as Eric's relationship with Daisy Renton.'
Does Priestley's portrayal of Gerald encourage the audience to feel more sympathetic towards Gerald than Eric?
- 8 'No character in *An Inspector Calls* is entirely good or bad. This is what makes them so complex.'
How does Priestley's portrayal of the Birlings suggest that they are flawed but have potential to change?

Britain in 1912 and 1945

An Inspector Calls is set near the beginning of the 20th century. Priestley wrote it in the 1940s. You're reading it now at the beginning of the next century. How things have changed...

In 1912 Britain was a very **Different** place from how it is **Now**

- 1) British society was firmly divided along class lines. Those with the most money had the most power. The Labour Party was formed in 1906 to represent the interests of the working class.
- 2) Only men who owned property could vote. Women weren't allowed to vote in national elections at all. Women's lives were far more controlled by their families and husbands than today.
- 3) There was not as much government help for people in need as there is today. This is why charities like Sybil's were so important.



The 1912 National Miners' Strike
Over a million workers across Britain campaigned for fairer wages for miners. At the time it was the largest strike in Britain.

Britain was heading towards the First World War...

- There was a dangerous level of tension between the big European countries in 1912, which resulted in the First World War (1914-1918). This was a terrible conflict which cost millions of lives.
- After the war many British people questioned the leadership given by the upper classes during the war.

Things had **Changed** by 1945 — but there were still big **Problems**

- 1) Britain was still divided by class, but by 1928 all men and women over 21 got the vote, which meant power was shared out more evenly.
- 2) There were still conflicts between business owners and workers, such as the 1926 General Strike which saw many important industries grind to a halt.
- 3) From 1930 a global economic slump known as the Depression hit many British industries. There was a big increase in unemployment and many workers faced terrible poverty.

Priestley wrote the play during the Second World War

- Millions of people from all classes had fought for Britain during the Second World War (1939-1945). After the war people wanted to work out how to make a better society.
- The world wars made people question Britain's social structure. Socialism and other left-wing ideas, which call for the more equal sharing out of wealth and power, became more popular.
- The Labour Party won the 1945 General Election by a landslide. In government they focused on improving the welfare system to look after the needs of the poorest in British society, e.g. the NHS was started in 1948.

Right-wing
ideas favour
private
ownership
and wealth.

The play's still popular in the 21st century — perhaps it's just as relevant...

The play takes a critical look at society in 1912 — but it's worth considering how *An Inspector Calls* can get us to think about today's current problems: poverty, the environment, sexism, exploitation, racism...

Family Life

At the start, Gerald thinks that the Birlings seem to be "a nice well-behaved family". But Gerald, and the audience, are yet to find out about the murky secrets lurking behind their polite and polished behaviour.

There were **Expectations of Middle-Class Families in 1912**

- 1) Family members were expected to know their role, and be content with their position — the parents were in charge of the family, and the children were expected to be obedient and unquestioning.
- 2) 'Gender roles' (how men and women are supposed to behave) were well defined for the wealthy middle class:

Men were expected to:

- Work to support their 'perfect' family.
- Protect women — especially their wives and daughters.

Women were expected to:

- Marry into money so they didn't have to work.
- Plan parties, visit friends and have children. They didn't do jobs like washing, cooking or cleaning.

- 3) However, working-class families, and especially working-class women, had very different roles. Many had jobs in factories or worked as servants.

The **Birling Family** seems fairly **Normal...**

- 1) The Birlings want everyone to believe they're the perfect family.
- 2) The gender roles are clearly defined — the ladies 'withdraw' to let the men talk about 'male' stuff.
- 3) But there's tension bubbling just under the surface:

- Mrs Birling keeps correcting her family's social mistakes.
- Eric laughs out of turn and acts oddly.
- Sheila teases Gerald half playfully, but also "half serious", about last summer.



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

... but something's **Not Right**

- 1) The clear hierarchy at the beginning is destroyed by the Inspector's arrival.
- 2) Without their parents' influence, Sheila and Eric can think for themselves:

A hierarchy is a way of ranking people according to status or authority.

- Sheila doesn't know whether she'll marry Gerald any more. She needs time to decide for herself.
- Eric says his mother doesn't "understand anything" and that Birling's "not the kind of father a chap could go to" for help.
- The family is in a mess, and Sheila and Eric refuse to "go on behaving just as we did". They don't want to pretend any more. The parents no longer have any authority over their children.

And I thought my family had problems...

The family is held together by lies, and when the truth's revealed they fall apart. And the truth's not pretty. There's hatred, jealousy, theft, prostitutes, and even being responsible for the death of your own grandchild...

Social Class

Social class is really important in *An Inspector Calls*. Class influences the Birlings' behaviour and causes them to treat people differently. The class system had existed for a long time and Priestley didn't agree with it.

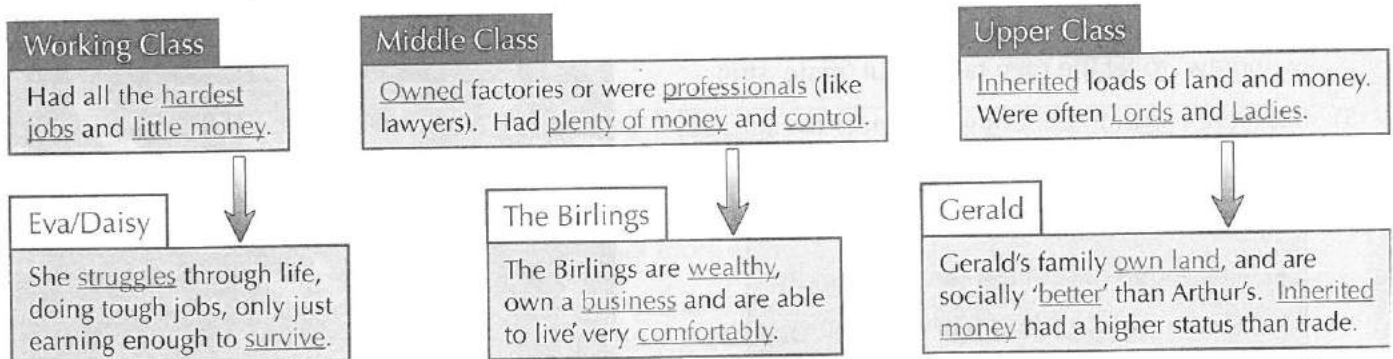
Class drives the Plot and Shapes the Characters



- 1) Priestley designed the characters to put across his message.
- 2) The message is about social responsibility, so class plays a central part in the plot.
- 3) The characters in the play represent the classes — and Priestley challenges their views and behaviour in order to challenge the class hierarchy.

There was a clear Class Structure in the Early 20th Century

Many things contributed to what class you were in, but most of it came down to money — those who had it, and those who didn't. There were three main classes:



The Class System meant the Lower Classes Struggled

- 1) The class system could make life difficult for those lower down — it would have been hard for people like Eva/Daisy to help themselves if they were in trouble.
- 2) Priestley portrays the upper classes as having a limited sense of social responsibility for those less well off. They either:

DIDN'T KNOW

OR

DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW

OR

DIDN'T CARE
- 3) Mrs Birling claims not to recognise Eva/Daisy's photo. For her, Eva/Daisy has no identity.
- 4) Priestley suggested that the higher classes didn't question the class system as it worked for them. This is the same reason why they also overlooked problems of alcoholism and womanising — it was easier to ignore unpleasant things than to deal with them.
- 5) The Inspector tells the Birlings that they must accept that everyone should take responsibility for each other, or it'll all end in "fire", "blood" and "anguish".

Social Class

The Birlings think Class is all that Matters

- 1) Birling's biggest concern about Eva's death is that he won't get his knighthood because there will be a "public scandal".
- 2) Birling thinks his positions of authority make him more important. He'd been Lord Mayor and an Alderman (Council member) for many years, and he's now a magistrate who sits in courts and dishes out justice. →
- 3) He uses Gerald to promote his social class — he asks him to hint to his parents that he's expecting a knighthood, and he's also very pleased that his daughter is marrying into a higher class.
- 4) Sybil Birling is a leading member of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation. This group's supposed to give money to desperate women, but Mrs Birling's only involved for the social status.

Theme — Judgement

It's ironic that Birling passes judgement on others when he's acted so immorally.

Priestley thought Class Shouldn't Matter

- 1) Priestley uses the play to reveal the unfairness of the class system — he uses the Birlings as exaggerated caricatures of all the bad qualities he thought the ruling classes had.
- 2) The play isn't just about one family's scandal. It shows how Priestley saw society. Priestley presents the Birlings' arrogant behaviour and selfish attitudes as common to the middle classes.
- 3) Priestley presents the working class as victims of the class system — although Eva/Daisy's story is unique, the miseries she suffered were probably quite common. Eva Smith could have been anyone.



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How people Act isn't just about Class

- 1) Eva/Daisy is expected to have low morals, but she refuses to accept stolen money even when she's desperate.
- 2) The Birlings think that class is all that matters, but Priestley is trying to present the opposite view. He suggests that class only clouds people's judgements, and people should be judged by what they do, not by what class they happen to be in.
- 3) By presenting Sheila and Eric as having changed at the end of the play, turning against the views of their own class, Priestley's saying that class isn't all that matters — individuals can break out and choose to act differently.

Writer's Technique

Priestley's presentation of Eva/Daisy as more honourable than the middle and upper classes might have surprised some members of the audience.

I was born with a plastic spoon in my mouth...

The Inspector doesn't clearly fit into the class structure. Instead, he pulls it apart. He challenges the attitudes of Sheila and Eric and makes them want to change their ways — this makes the audience question their own beliefs.

Young and Old

The Inspector, and his story about Eva Smith/Daisy Renton, causes a rift between the old traditionalists and the young idealists. One side wants nothing to do with the story — the other feels like it's their job to rewrite it.

The Older Generation are Old-Fashioned

- 1) Priestley presents Arthur and Sybil Birling as having very traditional views — they think that they know best, that children should be seen and not heard, and they don't like their authority to be challenged.
- 2) They represent the views of the ruling class.
- 3) By questioning their old-fashioned personal views, Priestley also questions their obsession with social class — he's suggesting that the whole class system is out of touch and needs to be reformed.

The Younger generation are Different

- 1) Some are ambitious, determined and motivated — Eva/Daisy “had a lot to say — far too much”. Her courage is the main reason Birling sacked her.
- 2) The younger generation are shown as challenging the authority of their elders. This threatens Birling, who tells them they'd “better keep quiet”.
- 3) Because the younger generation learn their lesson, there's a chance for an equal and fairer society in the future.

Theme — Learning

Eric and Sheila learn that they are responsible for their actions and that their decisions affect other people.

Eric at the end is standing around as if he wants nothing to do with his parents. Sheila stands by him. By the end of the play they're no longer controlled by their parents.

Gerald's the Oldest young man around

- 1) Gerald's closer to Sheila and Eric's age than he is to Mr and Mrs Birling's, but he's a young man who's already old in his attitudes. He's a younger version of Arthur — shallow and stubborn:

- His marriage to Sheila is for business reasons.
- He agrees with Birling that Eva/Daisy had to be fired.

- 2) He doesn't learn anything:

- When he's found out to have ditched Daisy/Eva, he doesn't seem to feel guilty.
- At the end, he thinks his engagement's back on: “Everything's all right now, Sheila.”

- 3) The fact that Gerald is of the younger generation but remains unchanged suggests that a more caring future isn't inevitable — people can choose whether to change or not. Priestley is also making a criticism of the upper classes, that they're set in their ways and therefore unlikely to change.



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

If there ever was an argument for bringing back the Generation Game...

They kept telling me when I was a child that I was the future — now they tell me that you're the future... I wish they'd make up their minds. Priestley thought that the younger generation were the future too.

Men and Women

In 1912, men and women had different roles in the family and society — they led very different lives from each other. Priestley is asking his audience to think about how people are treated differently because of their gender.

The Women and Men start out as Stereotypes

A stereotype is an idea you might have about people before you really know them. It's usually based on things like their sex, age and class.

WOMEN

- 1) They're supposed to be obsessed with "pretty clothes", shopping and weddings — Sheila gazes adoringly at her ring and asks, "is it the one you wanted me to have?".
- 2) They're protected against "unpleasant and disturbing" things.
- 3) Sheila gets Eva sacked because of pride, vanity and jealousy — stereotypical female traits in the play.
- 4) Sheila is accused of being hysterical — a state often associated with women at the time.

MEN

- 1) They're preoccupied with work and public affairs — e.g. "the miners came out on strike".
- 2) Gerald feels it's his duty to rescue Daisy/Eva from the womanising Alderman Meggarty.
- 3) Gerald is allowed to sleep around before his marriage. Sheila isn't. Arthur says that even in his day they "broke out and had a bit of fun sometimes". There are different rules for men and women.

The Young Women Challenge the Stereotypes

Eva/Daisy and Sheila try to rebel and break out of the roles that society has given them.

- Eva/Daisy questioned the decision of her boss instead of quietly accepting it.
- Instead of relying on a man to save her, Eva/Daisy refused to accept Eric's stolen money.
- Sheila interrupts and challenges everyone at different times, apart from the Inspector.

By the End the Stereotypes are turned Upside Down

- 1) As the play develops Birling, Gerald and Eric get weaker, while Sheila gets stronger. Priestley does this to challenge the audience's view of women at the time.
- 2) Gerald's rejected by Sheila, and Eric is revealed to be nervous and lazy, with a drinking problem. Birling suffers the most — the whole night has slowly undermined his authority. He's "panic-stricken" as he speaks the final line — a very different man from the one at the beginning.
- 3) Sheila starts stating her own opinions, not those she is 'supposed' to have — "That's what's important — and not whether a man is a police inspector or not." She's learnt to think for herself.



© Simon Gough Photography

Priestley's a playwright with an a-gender...

The Birlings look at class, gender and even clothes to tell people apart — and keep them apart. Stereotypes help them decide who they like and don't like before getting to know them. Which is not very fair...

Judgement

Priestley makes the end of the play quite a mystery — it's a bit of a cliffhanger. Apart from making the play more exciting, it leaves the audience to figure out what has happened, and more importantly, who to judge.

The Style is like an old Morality Play

An Inspector Calls is like a murder mystery — but it's also like a morality play.

- 1) Morality plays were religious plays written in the late Middle Ages. They tried to teach people how to behave and were warnings against the dangers of sin.
- 2) *An Inspector Calls* follows the same kind of idea as these morality plays — it points out everyone's sins, and tries to get them to confess and repent.
- 3) This play is different from the old morality plays, because it doesn't follow Christian ideas. The moral judge isn't God, it's a police inspector. Priestley makes his morality play secular.
- 4) The Inspector represents temporal law (law courts not based on religion) — but in the end it turns out that it's not a legal issue — it's a moral one.

Writer's Technique

Morality plays focus on the seven deadly sins — pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, anger and sloth.

Secular means 'not religious'.

There's something Odd about the Inspector

- 1) Sheila says she had an idea "all along" that "there was something curious about him" and questions the supernatural side of the whole thing — she asks what he was, not who he was.
- 2) His origin is unknown, and he appears omniscient — they didn't tell him anything he didn't already know. It seems unbelievable that a real inspector would know so many details.
- 3) Priestley deliberately leaves questions about the Inspector unanswered, as it increases the mystery and the feelings of tension within the play (see p.20).

Omniscient means 'knowing everything'.



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The Important thing is to Learn the Lesson

- 1) In the end, it doesn't matter who the Inspector is. He teaches the Birlings a lesson — what matters most is how they react to it and which of them learns from it.
 - Gerald, Arthur and Sybil decide it was a hoax. They're relieved that the Inspector was a fraud — they think they've been let off the hook.
 - Sheila and Eric waver slightly when they find out there was no suicide, but they've learnt the important lesson — even if their story didn't have the tragic ending it might have done.
- 2) Sheila and Eric hold true to their moral instincts — even when they're given an opportunity to pretend it never happened. The others, however, act selfishly and never take responsibility for their actions.

Gerald and the Birlings could represent the seven deadly sins...

Birling is proud and full of capitalist greed, Sybil's wrath stops her from helping Eva, Sheila gets Eva sacked because of envy, Gerald covets Eva for himself, whilst Eric is a lazy layabout who has a lustful affair with Eva.

Learning about Life

This play presents a harsh world. It's not a world for innocent people. You've got to learn fast. Some innocents — like Eva/Daisy's baby — die without ever having a chance.

Some people **Never Learn...**

- 1) Birling sneers at Eric's private education and the younger generation who "know it all", because he's worked his way up.
- 2) This arrogance is the reason why Birling is so stubborn. He doesn't think anyone has anything of use to tell him — especially not his children or a lowly inspector. He only listens to Gerald because he's from a higher social class.
- 3) Arthur, Sybil and Gerald's arrogance prevents them from changing. They don't see anything wrong in the way they think or act. They believe that they know best. Mr Birling's views are made clear in Act One and they don't change.

Theme — Young and Old

This is ironic — it's mainly the older generation who think they know it all.

... others **Try to Change**

- 1) The Inspector has much more of an effect on Eric and Sheila, who are ashamed of their behaviour. They reject their parents who have refused to learn from the night's events.
- 2) They understand that the important thing about the evening was the lesson learnt, not whether the Inspector was real.
- 3) Before they even realise they're involved with the girl's death, they criticise their father's behaviour.
- 4) Sheila changes not only her views but also her personality — she starts out playful, self-centred and obedient, but as the play progresses her character dramatically develops and she becomes more aware, sensitive and mature.



© Simon Gough Photography

Ignorance is Bliss

- 1) One of the reasons that the older generation refuse to change is that they're happy living in ignorance. The problems of the working class don't affect them, so they don't want to know.
- 2) In fact, they don't like to think about anything troubling:
 - Prostitution — "I see no point in mentioning the subject," says Birling.
 - Womanising — "you don't mean Alderman Meggarty?" says Mrs Birling, even though it's well known.
 - Drinking — "It isn't true" says Mrs Birling when Eric's habit is revealed.
- 3) Even Sheila tries to forget about her bad behaviour — "it didn't seem to be anything very terrible at the time."
- 4) They do everything they can to avoid changing, even when it's clear that they've done wrong — they refuse to believe it, and blame everyone else instead.
- 5) It suits them to think that they're always right — they don't see the point of changing or learning from their night's ordeal. The system works in their favour.

I remember losing my ignorance — I found out what jelly was made from...

If you don't know, don't look it up. It's better that way. Sheila and Eric lose their ignorance in a much more profound way. In becoming aware of the world as it really is, they see their own selfish views in a new light.

Social Responsibility

The play's purpose is to show the importance of social responsibility — the idea that people should act in a way that helps less privileged people rather than hurting them.

The *Characters'* views are *Challenged*

Birling...

... thinks that community responsibility is "nonsense". The interests of business are more important than worker's rights.

Mrs Birling...

... believes that they have no responsibility to the working class — her prejudices are so ingrained that they can't be changed.

Sheila...

... realises that getting Eva/Daisy sacked out of spite was irresponsible — but she didn't do anything about it at the time. The Inspector challenges her to improve her behaviour.

Eric...

... realises too late that his selfish actions were responsible for ruining Eva/Daisy's chances of improving her life.

Social Responsibility is the Inspector's main Focus

- 1) His final speech is clear and to the point — it's a summary of his lesson about responsibility.
- 2) The Inspector wasn't just trying to make the family feel guilty for Eva Smith, but to make them aware of the difficulties faced by all the "millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths".

All the events in *An Inspector Calls* are connected. Priestley's moral seems to be that it doesn't take great people to change the world — we all change it every day just by the way we treat others.

The Play Reveals a lot about Priestley's *Socialist* ideas

- 1) Priestley was a supporter of socialism — his plays promote social responsibility and criticise the problems caused by the class divide.
- 2) *An Inspector Calls* tries to make the audience question not only their social responsibility, but also how responsible they are for their own actions.
- 3) The audience are already wary of Birling's short-sighted opinions, so when he criticises socialism, the audience are more inclined to disagree with him. In this way Priestley uses Birling to promote socialist ideas

- During his speech at the start, Birling says that the whole world will have "peace and prosperity" except "Russia". Russia became a socialist state in 1917, and Priestley was interested in seeing how successful this was in creating greater equality for the Russian people. The first production of *An Inspector Calls* was held in Moscow in 1946.
- Birling attacks George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells, who were well-known socialist writers during that time — just like Priestley in the 1940s.

The most important lesson is to 'care about others' — I thought it was ICT...

Not really — I can barely use a computer. Priestley is a bit preachy (not surprising given his surname) but that's the whole point of the play. He wants to spread awareness of social responsibility as far as he can...

Practice Questions

Priestley lived through two world wars, where people fought to defend Great Britain. With *An Inspector Calls*, he seems to be asking "What sort of society are we trying to defend?" and "Is it worth defending?". But don't worry — these quick questions aren't half as tough as that. They're just supposed to get you thinking.

Quick Questions

- Q1 List two things that were different in 1912 compared to today.
- Q2 What happened in 1914 that would change Britain forever?
- Q3 List three events that changed the social structure in Britain between 1914 and 1945.
- Q4 Which class is represented in the play by each of the following characters?
a) Gerald b) Arthur Birling c) Eva Smith
- Q5 Describe how middle-class women were expected to behave in 1912.
- Q6 Find two quotations in the play that suggest Eric feels left out of family life.
- Q7 List two positions of authority that Mr Birling has held.
- Q8 How do Eric and Sheila rebel against their parents towards the end of the play?
- Q9 What is a morality play?
- Q10 Which other socialist writers does Priestley mention in Arthur Birling's speech about business and industry?

In-depth Questions

- Q1 How does Priestley's presentation of the Birlings make you feel about the middle classes in 1912?
- Q2 Does the Inspector fit into a social class? Explain your answer.
- Q3 Joe Meggarty is an alderman and also a "notorious womanizer". What do you think Priestley is trying to say about 'respectable' society by telling us about this character?
- Q4 At the start of the play, the characters form a clear hierarchy, with Arthur Birling at the top and Eva/Daisy at the bottom. Priestley uses the events of the play to rearrange this hierarchy. How do you think things stand at the end of the play?
- Q5 Do you think Sheila conforms to the gender stereotype for middle-class women in 1912?
- Q6 Why do you think the real identity of the Inspector is never revealed? Does it matter that we don't find out who he really is?
- Q7 What effect do you think the final revelation (that a girl has died after drinking disinfectant and an inspector is on his way) will have on each of the characters?
- Q8 As the Inspector carries out his investigation, the Birling family becomes more and more divided between the old and the young. Find some quotes which show where Gerald fits in.

Practice Questions

These theme questions are trickier than the questions about plot and characters — but this is the kind of stuff that's likely to come up in the exam, so make sure you're ready for whatever they throw at you by having a go at these exam-style questions. Always remember to use quotations from the text to back up your answer.

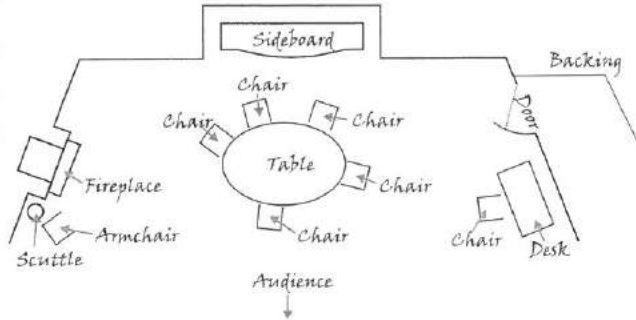
Exam-style Questions

- 1 How does Priestley present ideas about judgement in *An Inspector Calls*?
- 2 'Eva Smith shows how society sees innocence as something to take advantage of.'
How does Priestley present the theme of innocence in the play?
- 3 How does Priestley show the problems caused by the class system within the play?
- 4 How does Priestley present the idea of conflict between the generations in *An Inspector Calls*?
- 5 Why do you think Priestley chose to set *An Inspector Calls* in 1912?
- 6 Does Priestley's portrayal of Eva Smith encourage you to blame her at any point in the play?
- 7 'Sheila's views on social responsibility have been permanently changed.'
How does Priestley present the theme of social responsibility in the play?
- 8 How does Priestley explore the relationships between men and women in *An Inspector Calls*?

'An Inspector Calls' on the Stage

An Inspector Calls is a play — don't call it a book or a novel. Priestley wrote it for the stage — to be seen and heard and performed. These pages should help explain how to go about discussing a dramatic text.

One Set can be used for the **Whole Play**



This diagram is a plan of the set used in the first production of *An Inspector Calls*, in 1946.

- 1) All the action takes place in the Birlings' dining room — so the whole play can be staged using one set (though it doesn't have to be).
- 2) Priestley's design helps make the atmosphere of the play seem more claustrophobic and intense. The room's like a kettle, just about to boil.
- 3) It emphasises the Birlings' private and self-centred lifestyle and highlights the unwelcome arrival of the Inspector who brings bad news from outside.

A room that makes you feel trapped in a small space is described as 'claustrophobic'.

There are **Warning Signs** from the very **Beginning**

- 1) A good production of the play should show the family falling apart as their secrets are revealed.
- 2) At the beginning the audience should see that there are signs of problems:

- The actor playing Sheila should follow the stage directions "half serious, half playful" to make it clear that although she's joking with Gerald, she's not convinced he's telling her the truth about last summer.
- The actor playing Eric needs to balance his performance as a troubled, regular drinker, so that he doesn't seem too sober, but doesn't seem too drunk. This unsettles the audience because it's clear that something's not quite right.

The way the play **Looks** can say a lot about its **Message**

- 1) The play takes place in one room — suggesting the characters have closed themselves off from the world, with their close-minded behaviour.
- 2) The lighting is "pink and intimate" at the start, as if the Birlings are looking through 'rose-tinted glasses'. But it becomes "brighter and harder" when the Inspector arrives — as if a spotlight is turned on their cosy world.
- 3) The Birlings and Gerald look wealthy. This should be clear from their clothes and furniture. It's part of the image they present to society. In contrast, Inspector Goole looks relatively plain.
- 4) Stephen Daldry's production (first performed 1992) had an unusual set. The house was set on stilts, high above a street. The height showed their separation from the rest of the town, but the stilts made the house seem unsteady — suggesting that the Birlings' high status could easily collapse. Because the play wasn't just set in one room, the audience is reminded to think about the world outside.

Writer's Technique

Priestley's stage directions say how the play should look. But productions can change the set, lighting and costumes to suit their 'take' on the play.

This play should be staged in a marquee — it's intense...

Look closely at everything — from the lighting instructions to set design, and even the little stage directions that say Mrs Birling speaks "triumphantly". It's all part of the play and just as important as the dialogue.

Dramatic Techniques in 'An Inspector Calls'

Think of Priestley as an engineer — he's built the structure of the play with careful precision. He increases the tension and brings the action to an emotional climax using dramatic techniques.

Priestley Paces the Action to Build Tension and create Conflict

- 1) At the beginning of Act Two, the audience expects the story to move on to Gerald's confession. But instead, Priestley delays the action by shifting the audience's attention to Sybil and Sheila, insisting that they should be allowed to hear what he says. This builds tension and increases the audience's curiosity.
- 2) Priestley also increases tension by having the Inspector release information bit by bit. He shows the photo(s) to one person at a time and positions himself so the others can't see — the characters, like the audience, are kept on their toes.
- 3) The family all start seated, but by the end there are people standing, shouting, drinking and crying — it's a dramatic but slow change in how the stage looks and sounds.



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Entrances and Exits are Really Important

- 1) An exit can signal a character escaping someone or something — e.g. Sheila runs offstage when she realises she's the reason Eva was sacked. She wants to leave the intense atmosphere — but she's also running away from telling her story.
- 2) The Inspector uses exits to help draw information out of the other characters — e.g. he leaves Sheila and Gerald alone to discuss Daisy Renton.
- 3) The front door bangs every time someone leaves or enters the house. The characters on stage and the audience hear this — and wonder who's coming and going.

The Beginnings and Ends of the Acts are Dramatic Moments

Priestley freezes the action between Acts to create tension.

- Act One ends with the Inspector asking "Well?". Act Two opens with the same moment. The audience will wonder about the answer to his question during the break, which builds the suspense.
- The end of Act Two is another cliffhanger. The front door slams, announcing Eric's return, but Priestley makes the audience wait until Act Three for Eric's confession.



© Alastair Muir/Rex Features

Tension's at the heart of the play — Priestley's the pacemaker...

If you just look at the plot in terms of action and events, it seems as if nothing really happens — it's just people in a room. But Priestley's dramatic techniques draw out the Birlings' stories like flashbacks in a film.

The Language of 'An Inspector Calls'

The words a character uses can say a lot about their mood or their social class. Priestley's choice of words, the director's decisions about performance and the actor's interpretation of Priestley's tone can all play a part.

The characters' **Language** reveals **More** about them

The Birlings use words that were popular with middle- and upper-class people in 1912:

- 1) Words such as "chaps" (men) and "jingo" help show the characters' social class. It also suggests that the characters feel comfortable with each other — they're using the language of their social group.
- 2) Some slang words were popular with the younger generation but weren't used by their more old-fashioned parents. Sybil's shocked when Sheila says "squiffy".
- 3) Birling sees the world as a businessman views his company. When Birling realises the Inspector's visit was a "hoax" he uses business language to describe being fooled: "an elaborate sell!" The fact that his language links sales with tricks suggests he might not be an honest businessman either.

Inspector Goole uses language **Differently**

- 1) The Inspector doesn't mess about. He speaks his mind — e.g. he says Eva/Daisy was burnt "inside out" by disinfectant. This contrasts with Birling's long waffly speech at the beginning of Act One.
- 2) The Inspector uses plain and direct language, he only says what he needs to — there can't be any confusion.
- 3) He also uses silence — he has a "disconcerting habit" of staring for a while at a person before he speaks to them.
- 4) The older Birlings find him offensive because of his manner and language — he is "rude" and "impertinent".



© Donald Cooper/Rex Features

Sheila's **Language** Changes during the play

- 1) At the start of the play Sheila uses simple and childish language — e.g. she says, "I'm sorry, Daddy," when she's admiring her ring instead of listening to her father.
- 2) By the end of the play she's confident and assertive. She uses simple, plain and sometimes blunt English, just like the Inspector — e.g. "we drove that girl to commit suicide."
- 3) She directly disagrees with her parents. She tells them they're wrong to think the Inspector was a "joke" and points out that they "began to learn something" before they decided it was a hoax.

Writer's Technique

Priestley makes Sheila's voice sound full of emotion — her language seems honest and from the heart.

If silence is golden, the Inspector is a very generous man...

Find some quotations that show how Priestley uses language to reveal more about the characters' personalities. Look for short, aggressive words or long, waffly sentences and write down the effect they have.

Language Techniques in 'An Inspector Calls'

Priestley uses little language tricks to give different possible meanings to what his characters are saying. Just one carefully crafted sentence can tell the audience lots of things at once.

Priestley uses **Dramatic Irony** to influence the Audience

- 1) It seems as if the Inspector's omniscient — he knows everything.
- 2) Priestley gives similar power to the audience. He set the play in 1912, but the play was first performed in 1945. The audience know that a lot of what Birling dismisses in his speech actually happened.
- 3) When the audience know more than the characters, it's called dramatic irony.
- 4) There's more irony in Act One. Birling talks about getting a knighthood unless there's a "scandal". He jokes "complacently" (as if nothing will happen) but the play's title reveals that something will happen — an inspector will call.

Writer's Technique

Priestley uses dramatic irony to make Birling look short-sighted (see pages 6 and 22).

The Birlings use **Euphemism** to Hide what they Mean

- 1) A euphemism is a way of avoiding saying something unpleasant by using other, often more vague, words.

- Eva/Daisy "went on the streets" where she led "another kind of life" with the "women of the town". These euphemisms hint that she became a prostitute.
- To Mrs Birling, Eva/Daisy is a "girl of that sort" (she means a lower-class girl), and is in a particular "condition" (pregnant).

Theme — Learning about Life

Part of the Inspector's message is about accepting the truth. Using euphemisms does the opposite — it covers things up.

- 2) The Inspector doesn't use euphemisms. His language is more direct.

The Inspector uses **Imagery**

- 1) Language that creates a strong picture is called imagery.
- 2) The Inspector uses graphic imagery to shock — the words "Burnt her inside out" create an image that distresses Sheila and the audience.
- 3) The Inspector's final speech uses imagery from the Bible. This makes the Inspector sound like a religious figure:

- "We are members of one body" is an idea found in the Bible and the Inspector uses similar phrasing to suggest we have a 'sacred' duty to care for one another.
- The words "fire and blood and anguish" sound like the end of the world described in the Book of Revelation, where "fire mingled with blood" rains down — people are punished for their sins.



This cartoon from Punch magazine shows Alastair Sim, who played the Inspector in a 1954 film, as an angel with a flaming umbrella. In the Bible an angel with a flaming sword casts Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden.

The audience is hungry for knowledge — they're omniscient...

It's sometimes easy to get caught up in the action and plot of the play, but Priestley has carefully chosen the language and imagery used by his characters — don't forget to look at this as well as what the characters do.

Practice Questions

So, you've thought about the way the play looks and sounds on stage — now try your hand at some of these quick questions. Don't spend too much time answering them — and if you can't remember the answer, go back through this section to remind yourself. Then tackle the in-depth ones. They're a bit trickier.

Quick Questions

- Q1 What is the effect of having one set for the whole play?
- Q2 Give one example of how Priestley delays the action to build tension.
- Q3 What are the two stage directions that show how the lighting should change over the course of the play?
- Q4 The Birlings all start off seated and well behaved. How does this change over the course of the play?
- Q5 Find two examples of language that reveal the speaker's social class in the play.
- Q6 Why is it important that the front door slams every time someone comes in or goes out?
- Q7 What does the Birlings' use of words like "by jingo" and "squiffy" say about them?
- Q8 What is a euphemism? Give three examples of euphemisms used in *An Inspector Calls*.
- Q9 The Inspector predicts that men will be taught their lesson "in fire and blood and anguish". What religious ideas might this be referring to?
- Q10 Name two differences in the way that the Inspector speaks compared to the Birlings.

In-depth Questions

- Q1 Why do you think Priestley gave stage directions about the lighting effects?
- Q2 How does Priestley use irony for dramatic effect in the play?
- Q3 Look at the stage directions for the Inspector in Act One. Explain the effect his actions have on the other characters.
- Q4 Briefly sketch a set layout for a new production of *An Inspector Calls*. Explain the effect your design is intended to create.
- Q5 Find some examples that show how Sheila's language changes during the play and explain how this changes your opinion of her character.
- Q6 Do you think Stephen Daldry was right to extend the set design to include the street and other locations mentioned in the play? What do you think is gained and lost by this decision?
- Q7 Why is it important that the Inspector uses powerful imagery in his final speech, while the Birlings' language tends to be more down-to-earth?
- Q8 If you were directing a production of *An Inspector Calls*, and had decided to have Eva/Daisy on stage, what sort of costume would you choose for her? Explain your answer.

Practice Questions

Right — bring on the big guns. It's likely that you'll need to show awareness of stagecraft and the writer's techniques in your exam. Even if the exam question doesn't specifically mention it, it's good to show that you're aware of *An Inspector Calls* as a play rather than just a story. Have a think about how the stagecraft fits in with your other ideas about the play — if you do this, you'll find these questions easy as pie.

Exam-style Questions

- 1 How does Priestley use stage directions to create an effect on the audience?
- 2 'The difference between the Inspector and the Birlings is shown as much by how he says things as by what he says.'
How does Priestley use language in the play to show the differences between characters?
- 3 Reread the play from where the Inspector says "Stop!" to where he makes his final exit.
Explore the ways Priestley makes this such a dramatic and powerful moment in the play.
- 4 How does Priestley make *An Inspector Calls* such a dramatic, suspenseful play?
- 5 How does Priestley's portrayal of Mr and Mrs Birling contribute to the message of the play?
- 6 'The characters in *An Inspector Calls* rarely say quite what they mean.'
How does Priestley present the Birlings? Are they trustworthy in your view?
- 7 How does Priestley's portrayal of the Inspector make him such a powerful and moral figure?
- 8 'It's clear from the start that everything is not right with the Birlings.'
How does Priestley demonstrate this in the first part of Act One, before the Inspector arrives?

Assessment Advice

You might be studying *An Inspector Calls* for an exam or for a controlled assessment. Double-check with your teacher. If you're studying the play for an exam, this section will help you write a scorching answer. The planning and essay writing advice will be useful if you're doing a controlled assessment too...

The exam questions ask you to show **Three Main Skills**

- 1) That you can write about the text in a thoughtful way — picking out appropriate examples and quotations to back up your opinions.
- 2) That you can identify and explain features of the play's form, structure and language. You can also show how Priestley uses these to present the ideas, themes, characters and setting of the play effectively.
- 3) That you can write in a clear, well-structured way. 5% of the marks in your English Literature exams are for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Make sure that your writing is as accurate as possible.

For WJEC you might need to think about the play's cultural, social and historical background (i.e. Britain in 1912 and the 1940s). Ask your teacher if you're not sure.

Read the Question Carefully and Underline Key Words

- 1) The style of question you'll get depends on which exam board you're sitting. If you're studying the play for Controlled Assessment, this section's still worth a look — it'll help you with your essay structure.

AQA

You'll get a choice of two essay questions (without extracts) and you'll have to pick one.

OCR

There will be two questions for you to choose from. You can either answer a question on an extract from the play which will be provided in the exam or you can choose to answer the essay question.

WJEC

You'll have to answer two questions. For the first you'll have to comment on an extract from the play which will be provided in the exam. For the second you'll have a choice of two essay questions about the text as a whole, and you'll have to pick one.

- 2) Read the question at least twice, so you completely understand it. Underline the key words.

Here's an exam-style question

Q1 "...there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us,"

What do you think is Eva Smith's function in the play and how does Priestley present her in An Inspector Calls?

This just means how Priestley uses the character to develop the plot, atmosphere and key themes of the play.

Talk about how Priestley uses form, structure and language.

Make sure you give examples from the play to back up your points.

The advice squad — the best cops in the NYPD...

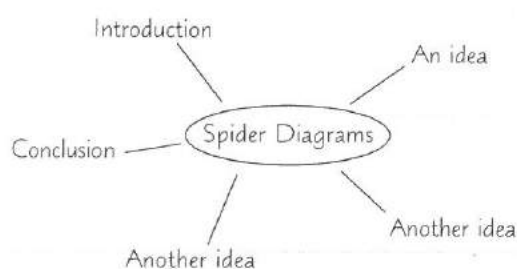
Whichever specification you're doing, the question is likely to touch on the main themes and characters of the play. It might also refer to Priestley's use of language. All the stuff you've been revising in fact.

Structure and Planning

It's easy to panic in the exam — all the more reason to spend 5 minutes jotting down a cunning plan for what you're going to write. It'll give you time to think and give your answer a better structure.

Plan your answer before you start

- 1) If you plan, you're less likely to forget something important.
- 2) Write your plan at the top of your answer booklet and draw a neat line through it when you've finished.
- 3) Don't spend too long on your plan. It's only rough work, so you don't need to write in full sentences. Here are a few examples of different ways you can plan your answer:



Bullet points and headings...

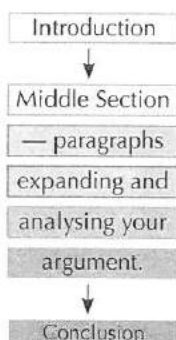
- Intro...
- An idea...
- The next idea...

Tables with...

A point...	Quote to back this up...
Another point...	Quote...
A different point...	Quote...
A brand new point...	Quote...

- 4) A good plan will help you organise your ideas — and write a good, well structured essay.

Structure your answer



- 1) Your introduction should give a brief answer to the question you're writing about. Make it clear how you're going to tackle the topic.
- 2) The middle section of your essay should explain your answer in detail. Write a paragraph for each point you make. Start the paragraph by making the point, and back it up with evidence — examples and quotations from *An Inspector Calls*. Then develop your point by analysing your example or quotation — saying why it's important.
- 3) Remember to write a conclusion — a paragraph at the end which sums up your main points.



Just one more question Mr Birling... how do you structure an answer?

Don't Panic if you make a Mistake

- 1) Okay, so say the exam is going well and you've timed it beautifully. Instead of putting your feet up on the desk for the last 5 minutes, it's a good idea to read through your answers at the end and correct any mistakes...
- 2) If you want to get rid of something, just cross it out. Don't scribble over it.
- 3) If you've left stuff out write it in a separate section at the end of the essay. Put a star (*) next to both the extra writing and the place you want it to go.

To plan or not to plan — that is the question...

The answer is yes, yes, a thousand times yes. People often dive right in, worried that planning will take up valuable time. But 5 minutes spent organising a well-structured answer is loads better than pages of waffle.

Sample Exam Question

And now the bit you've all been waiting for — a sample exam question and a lovely little plan. Go make yourself a cup of tea, settle down and enjoy.

Here's a Sample Exam Question

Read this feisty exam question. That's the best way to start...

Read the question carefully. Underline the important bits.

Who or what is he?
What role does he play?
What's he trying to do?

How do his language and actions reflect his purpose?

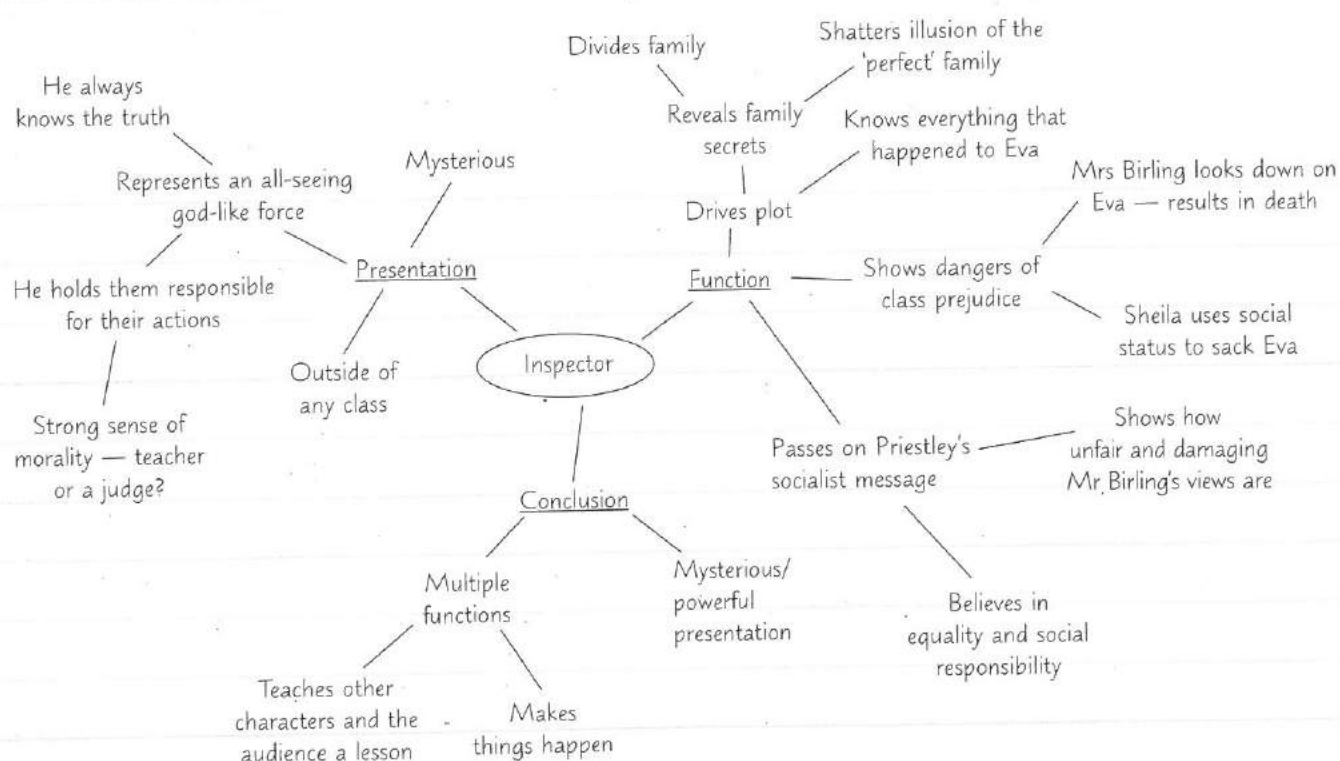
Remember to back up your points with evidence from the text and analyse why it's important.

Q1 What function does the character of the Inspector have in *An Inspector Calls*, and how does Priestley present this character?

What techniques does Priestley use to develop the Inspector's character?

Stick to the question in your answer. General comments won't impress the examiner.

Here's how you could Plan your Answer...



What do examiners eat — eggs-ham-wiches of course...

The most important thing to remember is don't panic. Take a deep breath, read the questions, pick a good 'un, write a plan... take another deep breath and start writing. Leave 5 minutes at the end to check too.

Worked Answer

These pages will show you how to turn an okay answer into a really good one that will impress the examiner.

Use your *Introduction* to get off to a *Good Start*

You might start with something like...

Priestley's play is intended to make everyone aware of their social responsibility.
The Inspector's main function is to clearly present this message.

These pages are all about how to word your sentences to impress the examiner, so we haven't included everything from the plan on page 55.

- 1) This intro is okay. It mentions the message of social responsibility and the Inspector's main function.
- 2) It's also a good idea to use the key words in the question (like function) to give your essay focus and show the examiner you're on track and that you're thinking about the question from the start.
- 3) But there's still room for improvement...

This intro explains the author's message and the point of the play.

In *An Inspector Calls* Priestley wants to put across an important message of equality. Everyone needs to be aware of their responsibility to others, and that they should treat everyone fairly. The Inspector's main function is to present this message to the audience clearly and powerfully. In order to do this, Priestley presents the Inspector as a mysterious god-like character, so that his views seem to hold more weight.

This tells the examiner what the essay's about and shows that you've thought about your essay structure.

Make your *First Paragraph* about the most *Important Point*

The Inspector presents Priestley's message in a variety of ways. His first function is to highlight the problems of a class-based society. Mrs Birling in particular shows no compassion towards Eva Smith because Eva is working class. Her line "Girls of that class" suggests that she can't even bear to speak the words 'working class'.

- 1) This paragraph gives an example of the problems with class-based societies and mentions the Inspector's role.
- 2) But... it doesn't develop the examples fully and it doesn't focus enough on the Inspector's function.
- 3) To improve the paragraph, it should have a clearer structure, more detail and an analysis of the Inspector's role in highlighting the problems with the class-based society.

This is a good start — it tells the examiner what you're going to talk about.

One of the primary functions of the Inspector in putting across Priestley's message is to highlight the problems of a social class system. In the play, the Birling family represent an outdated, class-obsessed society. Mrs Birling, for example, "didn't believe a word" of Eva's story because she wrongly assumes that having morals is "simply absurd" for a girl of that class. In contrast, the Inspector's opinions aren't clouded by class prejudices. He doesn't value the same things as the Birlings, for example, he's "never wanted to play" golf. He is classless, and so he sees things more clearly. This means the audience trusts his unbiased view of the situation — he functions as a god-like figure of moral judgement.

This is good because it includes a detailed example and it analyses and develops the point further.

Make sure you keep referring back to the question — one of the Inspector's functions is to judge and criticise the Birlings' prejudices.

Worked Answer

You need to make a **Variety of Points**

After you've talked about highlighting social problems you might start your next point like this:

Priestley presents the Inspector as rude and confrontational in order to create tension in the play. This means he often clashes with the other characters.

- 1) It introduces the way that Priestley presents the Inspector in more detail.
- 2) You can make this paragraph better by giving more detailed examples and backing up points with quotes.

Explaining how other characters view the Inspector is a good way of discussing his function.

Priestley uses the reactions of the other characters to show that the Inspector's behaviour is unexpectedly blunt and aggressive. Mr Birling accuses him of being "offensive" and tries to "protest". But it's because he says things that a normal Inspector wouldn't dare to that the Inspector has power over them. For example, the Inspector's blunt anger makes Mrs Birling feel "cowed" and forces her to admit that she was "prejudiced against" Eva.

Make sure you use a range of quotes, but don't quote huge chunks. Keep them snappy and relevant.

- 3) You could develop this further by describing how the Inspector also drives the plot forward:

The Inspector also has an important function in driving the plot forward, revealing how all the characters contributed to Eva's death. He appears to know everything, because of a "rough sort of diary" that Eva kept. But more importantly, he is in complete control of how information is revealed to the audience. Each character "must wait his turn" and when the Birlings get distracted by their own problems he interrupts "with authority" and forces the dialogue back to the developing story of Eva.

Using the word 'function' shows clearly that the answer relates to the question.

Finish your essay in **Style**

You could say:

In conclusion, the Inspector has many functions, but the main one is to put across Priestley's message of social responsibility. The Inspector is a powerful character because Priestley wants to strengthen his own message through the Inspector.

- 1) This conclusion's okay but it doesn't summarise how presentation helps develop the Inspector's function.
- 2) So to make it really impressive you could say something like...

In conclusion, Priestley uses the Inspector for a variety of functions, and his presentation is shaped for these purposes. By making him classless he stands outside the Birlings' world and can make judgements on the characters along with the audience. He also drives the plot, forcing out the confessions which move the play to its conclusion, namely that "we are responsible for each other." He is not just another character; Priestley presents him as omniscient and god-like to aid his function as a judge and a teacher as well as the author's mouthpiece.

This summarises some of the reasons Priestley has presented the character in such an unusual way.

Make your last sentence really stand out — it's your last opportunity to impress the examiner.

Why do alligators write good essays — because their quotes are snappy...

It seems like there's a lot to remember, but it's really quite simple. Just write a good intro and conclusion, make a range of points (one per paragraph) and put your most important point in paragraph one. Easy.

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The Characters from 'An Inspector Calls'

Phew! You should be an expert on *An Inspector Calls* by now. But if you want a bit of light relief and a quick recap of the play's plot, sit yourself down and read through *An Inspector Calls — The Cartoon...*

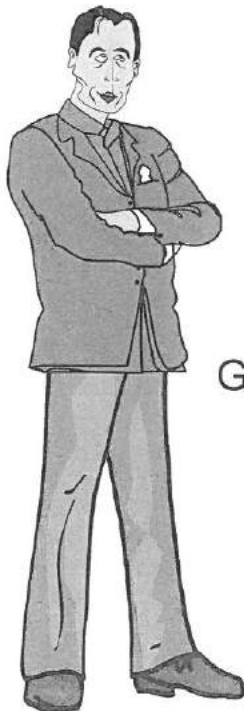
Arthur Birling



The Inspector



Sybil Birling



Gerald Croft



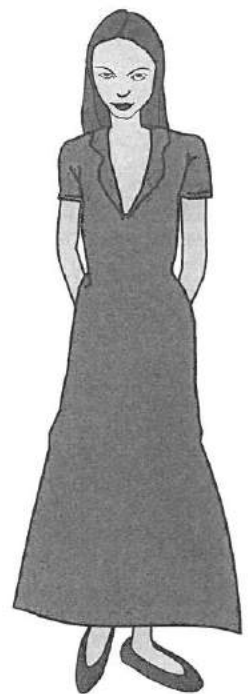
Eva Smith / Daisy Renton



Eric Birling



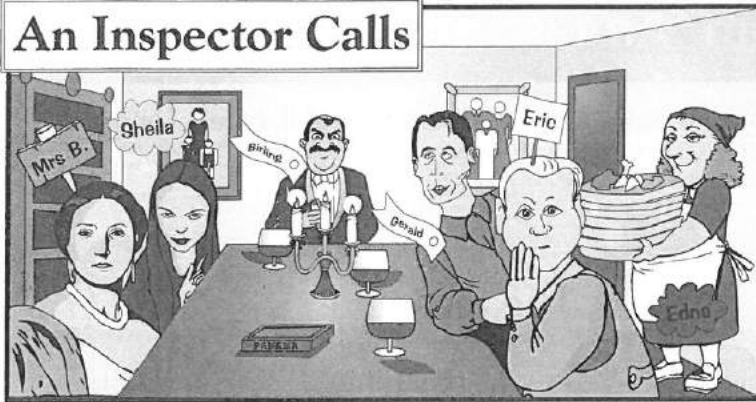
Edna



Sheila Birling

J. B. Priestley's 'An Inspector Calls'

An Inspector Calls



BIRLING TOASTS SHEILA AND GERALD'S ENGAGEMENT, SAYING:

Maybe our families will get together to lower labour costs and raise prices...

I know what I'm on about, me. Times are prosperous and business is booming. There's no way there'll ever be another war.

IRONY

And look at the progress we're making. Why, they've even built an unsinkable ship called the Titanic!

MRS. B., SHEILA & ERIC LEAVE BIRLING AND GERALD TO SMOKE

You know, I'm getting a knighthood.
Good stuff.

ERIC RETURNS. BIRLING GIVES A LECTURING SPEECH.

A man has to mind his own business and look after himself.
Ignore those chumps who'd have you looking out for other people. Pah!

There's an Inspector Goole at the door...

Ding Dong

Two hours ago a girl died in the infirmary. She committed suicide by swallowing strong disinfectant which burnt her insides. She died in agony.

Inspector Goole

What's that got to do wi...
She left a letter and a diary. Do you remember Eva Smith, Mr. Birling?

I remember her. She was a good worker but I had to sack her.
We want to be paid a bit more money so we're going on strike.
FLASHBACK
You're not getting a pay rise. You're a trouble maker. You're fired.

Can we see the photo?
No, I'll deal with one line of enquiry at a time.

She topped herself because you sacked her!
Don't be silly. I sacked her two years ago.

Her suicide's got nothing to do with me. It's just business, keeping the labour costs low and all that.
No, what you did affected what happened afterwards.
Pah!

What's going on?
This girl your father sacked drank disinfectant and died a gory death.
That's horrible.
It's not just your dad who's involved.

I've never known an Eva Smith.
Me neither.
Me neither.

After your father sacked her she was out of work and desperate. Then by a stroke of luck she was taken on as a shop assistant in Milwards. She was doing well but then she was sacked for seemingly no reason.
FLASHBACK
If only my parents were still alive...
Is there any chance of some work?
MILWARDS
It's your lucky day. All my staff are off with the flu.

Look at this photo of her.
GULP!

J. B. Priestley's 'An Inspector Calls'

FLASHBACK

Eva made me jealous so I used my influence to get her sacked. Sob, sob.

Hmmph, she looks much better than I would in that dress.

That awful girl was rude to me. Sack her, or I'll take my custom elsewhere.

Birling sacked a good worker because he didn't want to pay her a bit more money, and Sheila got her fired because she was jealous. It was after that she changed her name to Daisy Renton.

Did you have an affair last summer with this Eva Smith/Daisy Renton girl?

Yes, but Google doesn't have to know.

Ha, Ha, Ha! He knows everything already.

Gerald, how did you meet Eva Smith, calling herself Daisy Renton?

WHAT?!

FLASHBACK

I was working hard last summer. I met her in a VERY dodgy bar. I felt sorry for her and found her temporary lodgings. I didn't intend it, but after a while she became my mistress. After the summer I broke it off and she had to leave the lodgings. I never saw her again.

Prostitutes

SLAM!!!

That was Eric leaving. We don't need him.

Yes we DO.

Act 2

Look at this photo, Mrs Birling.

FLASHBACK

She came to us with lies about her name being Mrs Birling and a husband deserting her. She put my back up using that name. She gave me this cock and bull story about the father being a young drinker and she couldn't take his money because it was stolen. She was a liar so I used my influence to get the committee to turn her down.

Please help me. I'm desperate.

This girl is impertinent. I insist we give her nothing.

She needed help because she was pregnant, didn't she?

You can't pressurise me — I'm in the right. The father was to blame. He's responsible. He should be strung up.

Oh, mother, not! Don't you see?

What?...Oh no, you mean it was my boy?

You know, don't you?

I met her in the Palace Bar when I was a bit squiffy. I don't remember much about it. I saw her a few times and she told me she was preggers. I was scared, I stole money from dad's business, but she wouldn't take it when she realised it was stolen.

I can't take that money.

Hey, baby!

FLASHBACK

Act 3

We do.

Then mum turned her away from her charity.

You killed her, mum, and your own grandchild!

Eva Smith killed herself, dying a horrible death. But you all helped to kill her. NEVER FORGET IT.

And remember, there are millions of Eva Smiths out there. We are all responsible for each other. Goodnight.

It'll be a scandal. We're ashamed of you, Eric.

The Inspector wasn't a real policeman or copper!

I'm ashamed of both of you, mum and dad.

We've been had. It was a hoaxer.

He could've shown us all different photos!

We still killed someone!

Who says?

Phew! Everything's alright.

No one died at the hospital.

We still did those things even if it didn't end in tragedy. We're not suddenly nice people.

That was the police. A girl has just killed herself with disinfectant. An Inspector is coming to ask us some questions...

The End